

INDIFFERENCE
FOR
RELIGION
INEXCUSABLE;

OR, A
Serious, impartial and practical Review
OF THE
Certainty, Importance, and Har-
mony of Religion both Natural
and Revealed.

“ Let us reason cautiously, pronounce modestly, prac-
“ tise sincerely, and hope humbly. To do this is
“ to be wise and good; and to be wise and good
“ is better far than to be a philosopher, a metaphy-
“ fician, or even a divine.”

BOLINGBROKE'S Works, vol. 3. p. 384.

THE THIRD EDITION.

By SAMUEL SQUIRE, D. D. K

Clerk of the Closet to his Royal Highness
the Prince of WALES:

And now Lord Bishop of St. DAVID'S.

L O N D O N :

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One is more sensible of the great value of the public in the favourable reception which it has been pleased to give to this book, than the author himself. It is too conscious of the imperfection, which his work still labours under, not to wish that his merit were such and things had been done more judiciously.

As his original plan was to select those evidences only in illustration of the truth of religion, which, by reason, were founded on a basis of truth, and to make a full and complete exposition upon the minds of the generality of his readers, he found himself under a necessity of changing many arguments which he knew had been, and were to be, successfully urged in his favour, and to the common faith. It was for this reason that he has said so little concerning the arguments in proof of the Christian religion.



Advertifement.

NO one is more fenfible of the great candour of the publick, in the favourable reception which it has been pleased to give to this book, than the author himfelf. He is too confcious of the imperfections, which his work ftill labours under, not to wifh that his utmoft care and diligence had enabled him to have entirely removed them.

As his original plan was to felect thofe evidences only in attestation of the truth of religion, which, by having their united ftrength drawn into a narrow compafs, he imagined, were moft likely to make a lafting impreffion upon the minds of the generality of his readers; he found himfelf under a neceffity of omitting many arguments, which he knew had been, and might again be fuccesfully urged in defence and fupport of the common faith. It was for this reafon that he has faid fo little concerning the argument, in proof of the divinity of our Saviours miffion, taken *from the complete fulfilling of*

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the law and the prophets in his person, namely, because he could not have done justice to the extensive and interesting subject, without entering into a more minute detail and examination of particular texts of scripture and historical circumstances, than was consistent with his intended brevity. The author would be greatly disappointed if he thought any one could possibly imagine, that he either looked upon this work himself, or desired other persons to look upon it, as an entire collection of the whole evidence, which may be offered, in favour of the certainty, importance and harmony of natural and revealed religion.

A table of contents, and an index of the principal matters comprehended in this work, having been much desired, the reader will find both these deficiencies supplied in this edition.

1759.

T O



TO HIS
ROYAL HIGHNESS
G E O R G E
Prince of WALES.

SIR,



Encouraged by the dignity and importance of my subject, I have presumed, with the most respectful humility,
to

DEDICATION.

to beg the honour of Your ROYAL HIGHNESS's acceptance, and patronage, of the following sheets. They are intended to vindicate the evidence, to assert the reasonableness, to point out the advantages, to explain the doctrines, to shew the connexion, and to recommend and enforce the uniform practice of religion both natural and revealed; and therefore will not be thought unworthy the protection of a Prince, destined by his illustrious birth to defend the common faith, and by his distinguished virtues to adorn it. The exemplary devotion with which Your ROYAL HIGHNESS attends the publick worship of Your GOD, the eminent regularity of Your life and conversation
amidst

DEDICATION.

amidst the fire of youth, and the diffusive charity which animates all Your actions, shew that Your ROYAL HIGHNESS has chosen that better part, which will most effectually promote (what will be always nearest to Your heart) the solid and essential interests of Your country. For there is not a more infallible maxim in the whole science of government, than that religion is the great strength and support of the civil administration, introducing and encouraging the observation of every virtue, which can advance and secure the real prosperity of a nation. What lasting happiness may not GREAT BRITAIN promise to herself, under the auspicious influence of a Prince free from bigotry and superstition, and
unaf-

DEDICATION.

unaffectedly zealous for the benevolent doctrines of pure christianity!

May the blessings of that Wisdom, in whose right hand is length of days, and in her left riches and honour, ever attend Your ROYAL HIGHNESS, to guide and conduct You in all Your steps! I am,

SIR,

Your ROYAL HIGHNESS's


most humble, most dutiful,

and most faithful servant,

Samuel Squire.



P R E F A C E.

 O lay before the attentive and well-disposed reader a plain, distinct and connected review of the chief principles of religion both natural and revealed ; to describe the evidence upon which they are founded ; to point out the essential laws of moral action, and to furnish the strongest motives to live agreeably to those laws, is the intention of the following pages. They are designed as a remedy against that indifference, with regard to God and his worship, which is every day making such a mighty progress amongst us, by evincing, *that the great doctrines and duties of religion are inseparably connected with the existence of the divine Being, the uncorrupted dictates of right reason, our own truest happiness, and the lasting interests of society.*

P R E F A C E.

In pursuance of this plan, I have all along treated the various articles of my important subject in the plainest, easiest and most practical manner, wishing, at the same time, both to touch the heart, and convince the understanding; I have endeavoured to keep as free as I possibly could from the perplexities of the controversial stile, and to conduct my reader from the proof of one proposition to another, without ever suffering his attention to be interrupted either by abstruse speculations in metaphysics, or by literary disquisitions, or by uncharitable censures upon other persons mistakes.

But more especially have I studiously avoided entering upon any of those intricate and thorny subjects of disputation, which divide Christians amongst themselves: such discussions being entirely useless, either to awaken the consciences of those, who are indifferent to all religion; or to remove the prejudices of such, as really doubt of the celestial

P R E F A C E.

lestial origin of that system of faith and duty, which we profess. *

The most material objections which have been hitherto urged against religion, though not drawn out into mode and figure, the competent reader will find either obviated or refuted in the very manner of examining, stating and proving the several points, as they come before him — And though it be impossible, in the present dawn of knowledge, wholly to remove every difficulty, which may be started by subtle and ingenious men *concerning the Deity and his attributes, the foundation of moral obligation,*

* *Fabricii præf. ad delect. argument. & syllab. scriptor. qui veritatem relig. christian. contra atheos, &c. asseruerunt* — “Itaque nolis mirari, quod non
 “hic occurrent tibi adeo multa de S. S. Trinitate;
 “de persona & naturis Θεανθρώπου Christi, de ejus
 “satisfactione & de sacramentis. Nam licet hæc
 “quoque negantur vel oppugnantur ab iis qui Christi-
 “ani non sunt, tamen etiam simul ac Christo manus
 “dant, eumque tanquam Salvatorem ac Doctorem
 “suum recipiunt, pariter necesse est pro veris & divi-
 “nis hæc ab illis agnosci, nisi quatenus inter ipsos
 “Christianos de genuinis horum rationibus adhuc dis-
 “ceptatur, quas controversias excutere alterius
 “consilii operisque fuerit.”

P R E F A C E.

the certainty of a divine revelation, and its precise meaning in some particular instances ; yet, if the evidence for the truth of any proposition be clear, and the best which the nature of the subject will admit of, the reasonable and candid enquirer will acquiesce in the high degree of probability, and act conformably to it, without perplexing himself farther with such deep and curious researches, as will avail him nothing in his progress towards intellectual and religious perfection.

As I have not been solicitous to avoid the arguments of other authors, who have treated of the certainty, reasonableness and necessity of Religion in general, and of Christianity in particular : so neither have I scrupled, in some few instances, to borrow even their expressions, where they appeared to convey my meaning with more precision, fullness and strength, than my own had done. Nor should I have made the least hesitation of marking the passages, thus transcribed, in the usual manner, and of referring to the volumes,

P R E F A C E.

volumes, from whence they were selected ; had I not been apprehensive that by so doing my readers, as it often happens, might have been induced to pay more regard to the sentiments and authority of a great name, than to the weight of the proofs themselves, and the force of evidence.

Not having so many opportunities, at present, of addressing myself to my parishioners from the pulpit, as I had before I had the honour to be appointed clerk of the closet to his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales ; if this work may be of the least spiritual advantage to the worthy inhabitants of St. Annes and Greenwich, (to whose service and instruction it is more peculiarly devoted) or, indeed, if it may be serviceable to any other well-disposed persons, either by informing them of what may not hitherto have sufficiently engaged their attention, or by recalling things to their memory, which have been too lightly banished thence by the cares, pleasures and amusements of the world, I shall

P R E F A C E.

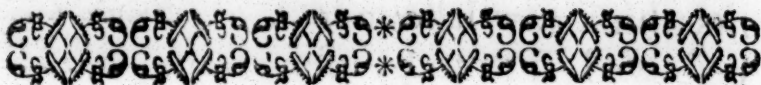
not think my labour in composing it ill bestowed. For to be useful to my fellow-creatures, to the best of my power, by advancing the essential interests of true virtue and pure religion, is my sincere desire, my earnest prayer, and my utmost ambition.

Greenwich, Oct. 7.

1757.



CON-



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INDIF-



INDIFFERENCE
FOR
RELIGION
INEXCUSABLE.

SECT. I.

Indifference for religion a fashionable and growing vice. Mankind should often be reminded of their essential duties, and have the evidences of religion frequently set before them.

IT is impossible for a considering man, who seriously attends to what is passing in the world, not to perceive, that an indolent neglect of the most important interests of morality is amongst the increasing evils of the present times, that a careless indifference, with respect to the duties owing to the Divine Being, is become a mark of politeness, and esteemed the result of a superior understanding; that there are too many amongst us
B who

2 *The Truth and Importance of*

who seem to be wholly regardless, whether there be any truth in Religion, or not; whether its high pretensions are well, or ill-founded; whether they have right, or wrong, or any notions at all upon the important subject; or, whether any thing be required of them either to do, or to forbear, in consequence of the religious principles, which they may chance to profess. As they often call themselves Christians, without believing the doctrines of him, by whose name they are distinguished; so is it too customary to believe without examination and conviction, and to be convinced without practising.

Surely, therefore, in such a situation of things, it cannot be looked upon either as an useless, or unnecessary undertaking to inform mankind, from time to time, of their essential duties; frequently to remind them, that they are rational as well as sensible creatures; that they have souls, as well as bodies, whose gratifications are to be consulted, and whose interest is to be provided for; continually to be calling off their affections from the momentary pleasures of animal nature to the pursuit of their greatest and most lasting good; to direct their maturest thoughts to the immoveable relations, which they stand in to their God, and to the inseparable connection by which they are united to their fellow-creatures; and, repeatedly, to set before them *the evidence, the utility, and the harmony of religion both natural and revealed.*

SECT.

S E C T. II.

The use and advantages resulting to religion, in general, from argument and enquiry; and, in particular, to revealed religion. The qualifications necessary to judge rightly of religious matters.

NOR have we any just grounds to be apprehensive, that by thus offering religion to the touchstone of argument and enquiry, its foundations may, in the event, be sapped and overturned, and the most sacred institutions taught to sit too light and easy upon our minds. On the contrary, we may be fully assured, that where the trial is sincere, where it is guided by a judgement impartial, discerning and well-informed, what is right, and just and good, will thereby become manifest, and be more securely established; whilst what is weak, and false and wicked, will be detected and exploded. By this means every various degree of evidence, from certainty to the least appearance of probability, will have its proportionable weight and influence upon our minds, and be made the rule and standard of our knowledge, our belief, and our practice. By this means also *authority* will be set upon its proper basis, and religion become, what it always ought to be, a free and reasonable service,—a service worthy of the Being to whom it is directed, and of man by whom it is performed.

It is true, *an extraordinary revelation of Gods will*, should such at any time be graciously vouchsafed to mankind, cannot deceive us, and therefore must always be absolutely and implicitly confided in and obeyed;

4 *The Truth and Importance of*

but it will, undoubtedly, be required of us, before we venture to build any thing upon this revelation, and to draw conclusions from it, to be assured, that it is really derived from the Father of light and truth. For to admit a revelation as coming from Heaven, without previous examination or proof, to believe in such revelation and to be led by it, is superstition and enthusiasm, is nothing else but mere fanaticism. To argue, therefore, for a blind, passive, and un-enquiring *faith and obedience*, in any case whatsoever, is to love darkness rather than sunshine; is to set open a wide door for all manner of error and delusion to enter in at; and highly to discredit the cause itself, in whose favour so absurd a plea is offered. For we shall suspect, and not without reason, that something weak, or wrong, or unjustifiable, is concealed under that which, we are told, must not be searched or narrowly looked into. It is a principle of the most pernicious consequence, as it has a direct tendency to confound the true religion with every sort of imposture; and will equally suit with all doctrines and opinions, even the most extravagant and contradictory. The heathen priest will strongly, and successfully, recommend it to us in defence of established idolatry; the Turk, upon this foundation, may safely believe his Koran; and the Jew persist in the observation of the antiquated religion of his forefathers. Those doctrines, which, by being founded upon right reason and evidence, are agreeable to the will of God, and, in fact, derived from him as their immediate source and original, cannot be overthrown; and, therefore, need not fear what either the force, or cunning, or malice of man
can

can do unto them. Truth never dreads being shewn in the fullest blaze of light; it will stand the strictest and most severe scrutiny, and is still growing brighter and brighter by being opposed, canvassed and examined into. It is an honest, impartial, and unprejudiced freedom of thinking and discoursing upon all subjects whatever, conducted with humility, decency and information, which ought to distinguish the religion of a Christian from that of all the world besides; it is what really does distinguish the well-instructed faith of a Protestant, from the bigotted and superstitious zeal of the Roman Catholick. Nor shall we find the enquiry into the *certainty, reasonableness and necessity of religion* so perplexing and difficult a task, as the want of accustoming ourselves to reflection, as the love of pleasure, and a dislike of studious attention, may, perhaps, persuade us to imagine; or as the immense variety of disputes, which have been raised upon this most interesting of all subjects, may induce us to believe. Much logick, an extensive literature, and a deep skill in metaphysics, are not so requisite to enable us to judge truly of what is right and wrong in religious matters, as an humble, candid, and ingenuous disposition; as an earnest desire to know our duty, in order more fully and exactly to practise it—it is the modest, and not the presumptuous, enquirer, who makes a real and safe progress in the discovery of divine truth.

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S E C T III.

The belief of a God, the Creator, Preserver, and Governour of all things, the foundation of religion. The being of an eternal, all-powerful, and all-wise God proved.

IS THERE, THEN, A GOD? Is there an eternal, all-powerful, all-wise and all-perfect Being, by the efficacy of whose will all things were at first created, and upon whom the whole universe is continually dependant, as upon its Preserver and Governour? Until *this fundamental article of faith* be settled to our entire satisfaction, our minds will be perpetually fluctuating in doubt and uncertainty; our religious hopes and fears will be all vain and irrational; and our notions of morality vague, empty, and uninfluencing. Behold, then, the never-ceasing order, beauty, and regularity of that wondrous constitution of things which every where surrounds us, and captivates our admiration! So much power, art, contrivance and design appear in every distinct part of the various system of nature, when considered by itself; and such exquisite proportion, harmony and mutual connection shine throughout the whole visible world, when the several parts are compared together, and referred to each other—that, whether we turn our admiring eyes inward, and contemplate our own structure and composition; or survey the infinity of objects, both animate and inanimate, which are every instant presenting themselves to our contemplation; we shall find it impossible seriously to doubt, for a single moment,

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ment, of the existence of an eternal, all-powerful and all-wise Being, the efficient cause of all things. The heavens and the earth, each in its place, proclaim this great and leading truth to mankind with such strength of demonstration; that he who, really, does not hear their united voice, who is not persuaded, who is not entirely convinced by it, may be securely pronounced to have lost the true use of his faculties, to be deaf, senseless, and void of understanding. To behold the stupendous machine of the universe with attention, to reflect upon its creation at first, and its continued preservation for so many ages since; and yet to believe, that there is no Being distinct from the machine itself, who originally planned and finished, and who still supports it, no energy nor intelligence but what was formed in it, and grew out of it, a man must be credulous beyond all computation and conception of credulity.

S E C T. IV.

The things which we see could not make themselves, nor did they owe their existence to hazard, nature, fate, or any other unintelligent cause.

DID that sun, for instance, whose uniform and well-ordered light and heat are essentially necessary to the preservation of this globe, and of the various species of living creatures, which have their dwellings in it, call himself into being? Did those trees and herbs, whose beauty we so justly admire, and without which life could not be supported, shoot out of the soil spontaneously, according to their several kinds, and cover the naked mold without any previous
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planting or sowing? Did that immense and permanent variety of animals, which people and adorn this earth without over-charging it, originally make themselves? or did they all owe their existence to other beings like themselves, weak, passive, perishing and dependant? The very supposition is, to the highest degree, ridiculous and absurd.—Was, then, this well-proportioned and self-agreeing system of sun, moon and stars; of animal and vegetable; of intellectual, sensible, and unfeeling; of air, water, and mineral, formed by *hazard* and the blind unguided-force of matter? Or was it produced into existence by the indeterminate and uncertain action of an *unmeaning nature*, and a *blind fatality*? Or, did it exist for ever (in the manner we see it at present) without a beginning, in a *perpetual series, order and succession*? But if it would be looked upon as absurd, and to an extreme degree irrational to suppose, that *hazard, nature, fate, or any other unintelligent and necessarily-acting cause whatever*, might, at present, form so intricate, so comprehensive and perfect a machine as the human body; or build and preserve a world so exquisitely finished, as that in which we are placed; it must have been always equally absurd to have made the supposition, to whatever distant period of duration, to whatever whimsical juvenescence of matter, we may strive to carry backwards our extravagant imaginations. For the mere circumstance of time cannot possibly make any difference in the case before us; nor can thousands and ten thousands of ages give activity, consistency and understanding to a cause, of whose essence it is to be unactive, irregular and unintelligent; or make those successions of beings,

beings, taken all together, to be independant, undervived, and self-existent, each of which successions, considered singly, is acknowledged to be wholly dependant upon, and derived from, the preceding. We know that there is a necessary and immutable relation between every cause and its effect; and that the general properties of the former may always be collected and known by carefully examining the appearances of the latter. As therefore confusion, deformity, continual change and monstrous variety are the natural and never-failing effects, where chance, blindness, and unperceiving necessity are the predominant principles: so are regularity, order, beauty, uniformity and perseverance, the genuine and universally-acknowledged offspring of power guided by wisdom, counsel and design.

S E C T. V.

Additional arguments in proof of the existence of an all-powerful and an all-wise being.

THE man, whose power of imagination will permit him to conceive, that the most excellent pieces of human art, skill and industry; the most magnificent palaces, for example, the most exquisite historical pictures, and the most useful and complicated machines, might have been built, painted, and constructed without any previous plan, contrivance, or foresight: the man whose wild and extravagant fancy will suffer him seriously to suppose, that the celebrated labours of a Homer, a Shakespear, or a Milton, might have been composed by throwing together at random, as fate or hazard directed,

rected, the different elements of the alphabet—such an one, indeed, could he be found, might still go on to fancy (for *believe* I am sure he could not) that this most beautiful structure of the human body (not to mention the other parts of the visible world) might have been framed by chance; that rationality, judgement, and free-will, might have been ground or pounded out of the infinitely small, round, and smooth particles which compose the general mass of matter; and that life, sense, self-motion, memory, reflection, abstraction, and all the other wonderful faculties of the soul, might have had no other source, cause or original, than the fortuitous concurrence, collision, and concretion of inanimate atoms.

But absurdities beget absurdities, whilst we are viewing the arguments of atheism, and one impossibility grows out of another. If fate, or hazard, or nature, or an innate energy inseparably residing in the universal matter (call it by what name you will) after an infinity of changes of form and place, did, at length, produce that immense variety of animals, which float in the summer-air, and which cover the surface of the earth, all of them completely furnished, as we see they are, with the parts necessary both to preserve their own existence, and to continue their several kinds: may it not reasonably be demanded, how it comes to pass, that this plastick efficacy having attained the exactest and most artful symmetry and structure for her several creatures, and lodged them in places most convenient to nourish them, has ever since desisted from her arduous labour? How it comes to pass, that animals are not still produced, in the original way, by fermentation and
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putrefaction, and yet that their several species are regularly continued without addition or diminution? Why does not this plastick nature still go on to make men without hands, feet or heads, as she must be supposed to have done, in the infinite diversity of her first terrestrial productions, before she arrived at the state of perfection, in which we see her works appear at present? What was there of motion, moisture, and fertility in the earth formerly, with which it is not now endued? Or will you suppose that this *plastick energy*, knowing that it is impossible for her to add any thing to the present perfection of her several creatures, has therefore prudently given over making any more experiments? But is not this to allot *wisdom and design* to a cause, of whose essence it is to be, and to act, without wisdom and design?

S E C T. VI.

The atheistical system, with regard to the production of animals, absurd and impossible. It is morally impossible for reasonable creatures to banish all notions of a God from their minds.

BUT let it be granted, for arguments sake, that this *ideal nature*, after an infinite variety of trials, might, by we know not what casual coincidence, commixture and co-operation of causes and effects, produce *one man, and one of each tribe of animals!* But is it possible even for the most extravagant imagination of the most extravagant visionary to conceive, that she should be able to produce two of each species? and that of these two, one of them
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should be a male, and the other a female? and that they should come into being just at the same time, and at the same place? and that that place should be previously furnished with all the conveniences of proper warmth, food, and water, so necessary both to supply the wants of creatures, who had nothing else but the mere sense of feeling for their direction, and to screen them likewise from that numerous train of accidents, which attend animal life in its infancy? In spite therefore of all which either reason or even fancy can invent to the contrary; let every vain imagination of scepticism be indulged with the most favourable examination; let every prejudice of education and custom be entirely thrown away: *yet still shall we find it morally impossible for us to banish from our minds the notion of a self-existent, all-powerful, and all-wise Being, the Creator and Father of all things.* We cannot open our attentive eyes for a moment, but the idea of a God will immediately rush in and force itself upon us, and we shall feel ourselves under an utter incapacity of seriously doubting of his existence. All observation, all knowledge, all science lead us to own this fundamental truth; and the universal reception, which it has met with from all sorts of thinking people, in all ages of the world, and in all places, manifestly evinces, that it is entirely suitable, proportionate and agreeable to the general conception and reason of mankind.

S E C T.

S E C T. VII.

Mankind greatly interested in knowing what Gods attributes are ; whether He be just and good, as well as all-powerful, and all-wise. The works of creation to be consulted for our information.

HERE, then, let us humbly presume more nearly to approach, and with more accuracy to survey, *this universal Source of being* ; let us go on to enquire into the whole of his perfections, as they may be collected from the system, wherein we are placed ; and endeavour, with all becoming modesty and reverence, to contemplate him in his *essential attributes*. Imagine not that we are here proposing to search into the *manner of Gods being*, which it would be unpardonable arrogance in us to attempt to explain, because it is impossible that we should be able to form any conception of it : or that we are curious to investigate either the *manner of that knowledge*, by which past, present and future are alike intuitively perceived both in their causes and effects, or the *manner of that power*, to which to will and to be done are the same.— But as sensible-rational-creatures, in a perpetual pursuit of every thing which may tend to perfect our natures, and to advance our truest happiness, we may be, and most undoubtedly are, extremely interested to enquire *into the attributes of the Deity*, as far as they may have any relation to ourselves, and to our system — and for such an enquiry we certainly have all the faculties necessary to direct our researches ; nor will our labour be in vain, if we proceed with proper
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attention, caution and perseverance. If the *being of God cannot possibly be matter of mere indifference to his creatures, surely it most nearly concerns them to endeavour by searching to find out and to know, who and what their God is.*

Are you, then, to look upon the God of nature, upon the author of this world, merely as an eternal and an all-powerful intelligence, cloathed indeed with majesty, dwelling in light inaccessible, and supremely happy in an indolent tranquillity, but, at the same time, utterly regardless of what passes amongst his humble creatures, unconnected with mankind, uncommunicative and unbenevolent? or is the Lord of the universe to be dreaded by you as an arbitrary being, governed only by the impetuous fallies of an unrestrained will, partial, austere, rigid, and wholly unconcerned at the miseries which he sees befall mankind?

Consult the volumes of the creation, as they lie open before you, the best, the surest and the only guides, by which you can hope to arrive at the knowledge of Gods perfections and of the nature of his connection with mankind, and you will soon be demonstratively convinced, that the almighty God, who in the beginning made the heavens and the earth, still continueth to rule in the kingdoms of men; that he is righteous in all his ways and holy in all his works; and that essential goodness, and essential justice are ever tempering, mitigating, and directing the mightiness of his irresistible power, and the designs of his infinite wisdom. But these are points, which call for a more particular and mature discussion.

S E C T.

S E C T. VIII.

Gods goodness demonstrated from the goodness perceived in mankind.

IF, then, you may be allowed to argue, as certainly you may, that there *must have been something from all eternity*, because there is *something now*: and that this *eternal something* must have been everlastingly *intelligent*, because there is *intelligence now*: surely the same manner of reasoning may with equal force and propriety, be applied to demonstrate, that the *eternal Being* must likewise be *good and just*. For that these qualities of *goodness and justice*, as they exist in free-reasonable beings, are perfections, and that these perfections, in a certain degree, are at present in mankind, you cannot but see and acknowledge: either therefore you must assert that they were eternally in the Creator, and from him communicated to the creatures; or you must maintain, that the creatures are more perfect than the Creator: that non-entity may produce entity, non-intelligence intelligence, and non-goodness goodness. But as this argument to prove *the goodness of God* may perhaps appear too general, and be too abstracted for your comprehension, especially if you have not been accustomed to metaphysical speculations: you will do well, seriously to consult your own feelings, and the unbiassed judgement, which your conscience makes of your present state, condition and circumstances in the world: you will do well to have recourse to the works of the creation, wherein the original will, design
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and intention of the Deity towards his creatures is fully contained ; for you may collect from thence, the most ample evidence in proof of the interesting question before you.

S E C T. IX.

Gods goodness demonstrated from the happiness, which he has, in fact, communicated to his sensible creatures.

Goodness may be defined to be an uniform inclination and disposition of the mind to communicate pleasure and happiness to all beings capable of enjoying them—a disposition however, neither moved by necessity, nor acting blindly without discernment, but regulated in all its operations by the dictates of right reason. And can it be denied, do we not in fact feel and experience, that there is much pleasure and happiness distributed and diffused throughout this whole system, especially among the children of men ? We are placed in a situation perfectly well fitted, and entirely agreeable, to our natures ; and are completely furnished with all the abilities both of body and mind, necessary to secure our being, and provide for our well-being. We love life, we are fond of existence, and extremely unwilling to part with it. But would this be the case, was the general amount of human misery larger than the sum of human happiness ? would this be the case, were the physical and moral evils, to which we are exposed, greater than the good of both kinds, which, unasked and unmerited, God has freely bestowed upon us ? For us also, and for our sakes, the sun rises, the rains descend in
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their appointed seasons, and the earth brings forth her fruits abundantly : *all nature* seems, in a sort, to be subservient to our ease, convenience and comfort, and to have been purposely made, that it might contribute to our pleasure and happiness. Let not the reader hastily imagine, that I am here giving to man a larger share of importance in the scale of being, than he really has ; or that, proud of the dignity of the human species, I am endeavouring to persuade him to believe, that every thing was created for our *sole* use and benefit. For there may be, and most probably are, a multitude of other wise and beneficent purposes intended to be served by these things, which we neither do, nor can know any thing of. But as we are, at present, enquiring, whether God be a good being, that is, whether he has a disposition to communicate happiness to his creatures ; the question, with reference to this system at least, must be, in a great measure, decided, as this system stands particularly related to ourselves, who make so considerable a part of it. For as we are conscious only of our own feelings, of our own pleasures and pains, it is from them only that we can securely argue in the present case. And therefore when we evidently perceive that almost every thing in this system either actually does, or, by the intervention of our skill, may be made, some way or other, to contribute to our convenient, comfortable and ornamental subsistence, we may, and we must, conclude, if we reason consistently, that this was one principal end, for which the wisdom and power of God originally intended these things, and consequently that, with respect to us, he is a *good being*.

S E C T. X.

Additional arguments in proof of Gods goodness to mankind.

WITH the like gracious view, intention and disposition in the Divine Being to communicate happiness to us, whatever tends to promote our preservation is so made and constituted by him, as to give us pleasure in its use: whilst things pernicious and destructive to our well-being are framed in such a manner, as to excite uneasiness and disorder in us. And as things agreeable in their nature and even salutary to us, when immoderately used, become prejudicial to our welfare, in order to prevent this abuse, pain is generally annexed to such immoderate use.—But could this be done without design; and does not such design plainly argue an uniform principle of benevolence in the mind of the designer?—So again; being made capable of contributing greatly either to the happiness, or to the misery of our fellow-creatures by our behaviour towards them, in order to encourage us to prefer the former, we find pleasure naturally annexed to a consciousness of willing their happiness, and pain to a consciousness of intending their misery. No man makes another happy, but he secretly applauds himself for so doing, nor voluntarily renders his fellow-creatures miserable, without silently condemning his own conduct. No man, designedly, puts another to pain, but to satisfy some favourite passion, or craving appetite, which, he imagines, cannot otherwise be satisfied; nor does he ever escape remorse and anguish, when the gratification, which excited the act of severity, ceases. Nay

we cannot even see the miserable without perceiving a disagreeable sensation in ourselves not be removed, but by endeavouring to ease, relieve and assist them, unless some particular displeasure has been conceived against the sufferers, on account of injuries supposed to be done either to ourselves, or others.*—In short, such is the benevolent constitution of the human system, that no man can procure his own greatest happiness (to which however he is irresistibly determined) but by contributing to the common good; but by attending to, and promoting, all that lies in his power, the general happiness. If, then, these inclinations, propensities, and instincts (call them by what name you please) were originally implanted in us, or were made the natural result of the constitution given to us by the wise Author of our existence, they must be looked upon as so many incontestible proofs, that he willed, proposed, and intended the universal happiness; that he has disposed us by our very frame and texture for a perpetual circulation of friendly offices, and formed us in such a manner, as to be ever willing, ready and pleased to assist, relieve, comfort, and make each other happy. But shall man be benevolent, and shall the Author of man be supposed destitute of this amiable principle, without which it is impossible to conceive a perfect character? As truly may we say, that he who made the eye does not himself see: and that he who formed the human understanding has himself no knowledge.

* See an *Enquiry into the evidence of the christian religion*, by Mrs. Newcome.

S E C T. XI.

The origin of evil both natural and moral, considered and reconciled to Gods goodness.

BUT why, then, is there all that misery and wretchedness in the world, which we every day see, feel, and hear so bitterly complained of? From whence arises this variety of woe, and how is it to be reconciled with the genuine fruits of this benevolent attribute? *If God be good, why are we not all completely happy? and what can prevent a Being whose wisdom is infinite, whose power nothing can resist, and to whom to will and to do is the same thing, from executing, to the utmost extent, his kind intentions toward his rational creatures?* — God has, certainly, performed the whole of his gracious intentions towards mankind; but we must conclude from his works, that his intentions were, not to communicate to them an absolute, unlimited and unrestricted happiness, but a conditional happiness only; a mixed, restrained and progressive happiness; a happiness consistent with moral agency, and his own righteous government of the universe. For, if he had intended the former, he would neither have created them *material*, nor permitted them the use of *free-will*, pains and death being the unavoidable consequence of the *material* composition of our bodies, as moral evil, and the whole train of mischiefs resulting from thence, are inseparably connected with the abuse of free-will—and yet, had we not been made *material*, we never could have existed as *men*; as, without a power of doing wrong as well as right, there could have been no better nor worse in human actions, there could have been no moral distinction

tion between man and man; nor could there have been any such thing as *rational happiness*, or that exquisite enjoyment, which arises from the consciousness of having behaved ourselves suitably to our nature and to the will of our Creator. The Supreme Being having once determined to create *man*, we may, I think, humbly presume to assert, that it was not within the power of Omnipotence itself, without a continual change or suspension of the laws of nature, entirely to prevent the origin either of natural, or moral evil. Why, indeed, the Divine Being was pleased to create us *men*, and to give us only a conditional and precarious happiness, instead of placing us in a situation, which would immediately and infallibly have conducted us to the possession of our chief good, we cannot be informed in our present state of being, nor are we greatly concerned to know. The proper business of mankind is to endeavour to find out what they, in fact, *are*, and how they are to behave in consequence of what they *are*, and not to amuse themselves, in vain, with enquiring, what they might have been had it pleased God.

S E C T. XII.

The same subject continued. Gods justice a necessary consequence of his goodness. The natural and moral attributes of God are inseparably connected with each other.

IF the Author of this system has completely furnished it with all the *means* necessary to make his rational creatures happy upon the whole, and has moreover supplied them with all the requisite powers both of body and mind to enable them to know and make use of these *means*, what can they

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reasonably demand more? They certainly have no sufficient cause to murmur and repine at their situation; to accuse their Creator of want of goodness to them, and to complain, that they are not made so perfect as, they imagine, they might have been. That they are frequently miserable, as indeed they are, that pain and grief are so frequently the bitter lot of their inheritance upon earth—is it not because they have acted irrationally, and against the dictates of their conscience and better judgement? is it not because they have freely indulged their craving passions, and implicitly followed their wrong notions of pleasure? is it not because they have voluntarily, and presumptuously turned out of the way, which they knew to be the nearest and the most direct way to conduct them to their truest happiness? Upon the whole; if there be more good than evil, more happiness than misery in this system, as there undoubtedly is by the universal confession, the conclusion is infallible, that *the Author of this system is a good Being*. For the end, design and intention of a powerful and intelligent Being, of a Being whose will is not arbitrarily and partially determined sometimes by one attribute and sometimes by another, but, in every instance, by the harmonious concurrence of them all with his wisdom, may always be collected with certainty from the most predominant appearances in his works. Though therefore we should not be able, as certainly we are not, to penetrate the secrets of the Divine nature and economy, to solve all the nice and intricate objections, raised by subtle and peevish metaphysicians concerning the origin, extent and consequences of evil, and perfectly to reconcile them with our notions of infinite goodness and foresight: yet whilst we perceive such a multitude of phenomena
entirely

entirely agreeable to our ideas of goodness, we may, and we must, conclude, if we will argue justly, that an equal portion of goodness is diffused throughout the whole creation, even in those instances, wherein it may not be so plainly obvious to our observation; the difference we must humbly impute to the shortness of our comprehension, and not to any defect of the Divine attributes. For a Being of unlimited power and perfect wisdom must always act consistently with himself; *nor can he be sometimes good, and sometimes evil, but must continually be the same, both yesterday, to day, and for ever.*

But if God be a *good Being*, it will necessarily follow, that he must likewise be *just*. For it is of the essence of goodness directed by intelligence and wisdom, after having examined the circumstances of each particular case, to render unto every one according to the merit, or demerit of his behaviour; that is, *it is of the essence of goodness to be just*, and to act in all instances conformably to the nature, truth, and differences of things.

To the *power*, therefore, the *understanding*, and the *wisdom* of God, we may now join (to complete our relative idea of him) *goodness* and *justice*. And so inseparably are these *moral perfections* connected with the *natural* both in our notions, and in their actual exertion, that he who denies the former to be essentially inherent in the Divine Being in their highest conceivable degree, may soon be reduced to a necessity of denying the latter to belong to him; that is, he may soon be reduced to the necessity of denying the very existence of God.

S E C T. XIII.

The perfections of God are of the same kind with the perfections of a similar denomination in man, tho' differing from them infinitely in degree. How we ought to think and speak of the Deity.

SAY not, therefore, under the pretence of an extraordinary veneration for the Divine Being, and to render, as you may perhaps be taught to imagine, the more exquisite honour to the transcendent excellency of his nature, that his attributes are not to be understood by us, and explained, in the literal sense and proper acceptation of the words: say not, that the perfections of God, and the perfections of the same denomination in man, do not only differ from each other *in degree and manner* of exertion, but that they are also *entirely different in kind*, without the least resemblance between them. For this is to increase the difficulties, which necessarily result of themselves from considering the Divine attributes; it is to put them at a greater variance with the human understanding, and, in reality, to banish all intelligible notions of a Deity out of the world, leaving him nothing but an empty name, without any ideas annexed to it. For the unknown substratum of an unknown set of attributes may be *chance* or *fate*, or *plastick nature*; it may be just such an infinite, eternal and unmeaning phantom, as sensualists and even atheists are willing to own, and ready to confess their belief of. If we are totally unacquainted with the nature of *Gods wisdom*; if *his goodness* be of such a sort, that we can form no ideas of it, and *his justice* of a kind not to be conceived by us: the consequence is as certain as it is obvious, that we cannot draw any rational conclusion
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from these attributes, and that, with regard to mankind at least, God will be the same, as if he was not wise, nor just, nor good. But this is all mockery and delusion. For we, certainly, may argue concerning the Deity, as we do concerning other intelligent beings, from what we see and perceive of him, from such clear representations, as the face of nature and the uniform appearances of things offer to our senses, reflection and reason. And the conclusions flowing from these arguments, as far as they go, are true and may safely be depended upon; or there is nothing in our reasoning true and to be depended upon, but we are to be perpetually fluctuating in doubt, uncertainty and irresolution. Thus, for instance, from the art, contrivance, and design, which so generally and so manifestly discover themselves in every various part of the constitution of the universe, as far as it falls within the compass of our observation, we are convinced, beyond a possibility of doubting, that the Author of this wondrous system must be a wise and understanding Being: but even this argumentation, plain and satisfactory as it appears to be, will be absurd, our conviction folly, and there will be an irreconcilable variance between the premises and conclusion, *unless the wisdom of God be of the same kind with the wisdom of man*; that is, unless the actions of the Deity are uniformly directed to some end, and that end be promoted by the best means. For this is the only notion of wisdom which we are able to form, nor will our arguments prove any thing for an unknown wisdom; or, what comes to the same point, for wisdom in a sense unknown. So again, with reference to the notions of mankind, there can be but *one idea of goodness, and one idea of justice*; and, consequently, there can be no more than

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than *one kind* of each, namely, an uniform disposition to communicate happiness, and to render unto every one according to their deserts. He, therefore, who denies goodness and justice in God to be of the same kind as they are in us, and in our ideas, must deny that there is a disposition in God to communicate happiness to his sensible creatures, and to act towards them agreeably to the essential differences of things. And he who denies this, denies, in fact, the goodness and justice of God, however splendidly he may declaim upon the interesting subject, and seem to express himself with a more than ordinary reverence for the Divine majesty. The *degrees*, indeed of wisdom, goodness and justice in God, and the *manner* wherein these several perfections are exerted, must be entirely different from what we perceive them to be in man, and such as are not within the reach of our faculties either to explain or even to conceive. But still the *kind* must be the same in both, as we most certainly experience the appearances and effects of both to be similar and analogous *. Very easy undoubtedly it is, when we are discoursing of the Divine nature so infinitely different from the human, to wade beyond our depth, and to plunge ourselves into inextricable difficulties, by reason of the inconceivable vastness of the subject on the one hand, and the narrowness of our understandings on the other: nor is it unusual for weak and ignorant mortals, immersed from their birth in material ideas, to make humanity the measure and standard of the divinity. But these absurdities we shall be able to avoid, as far as the condition

* See Mr. Bulkley's notes on the philosophical writings of Lord Bolingbroke, p. 151.

of our nature will permit, if we will be content to confine our reasoning upon this exalted topick to the phenomena of nature; if we will accustom ourselves never to think of the Deity but with the utmost veneration, or to speak of him, but as of a *Being, in whom all possible perfections are essentially inherent without any conceivable limitation or alloy.*

S E C T. XIV.

The belief of Gods Providence, both general and particular, the necessary consequence of a sincere belief of his being and attributes.

IF then you are convinced, that there is a God, the almighty Maker of the universe; and are moreover persuaded, that this Being is infinitely wise, and just, and good, and that these attributes are of the same kind with those of a similar denomination in man, and, as such, may reasonably and usefully, tho' cautiously, be argued from—it will, I think, be absolutely impossible for you to stop here, and not go on to believe, *that his Providence superintends the whole creation.* For is it conceivable, that a being so excellent in his nature, and so transcendent in every thing, which can be imagined greatest, best and most perfect, after having adjusted the immense machine of the universe, and impressed certain general laws of motion upon it, and commanded the several species of animals to increase and multiply, should immediately withdraw his influence from his work, as if it were unworthy his future notice, care and government? that he should never afterwards regard what became of it, or attend to what was doing amongst his creatures? *If hazard had no part in making this*

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this system, can you possibly persuade yourself to believe that it has any share in directing and governing it?

God, it is true, is infinitely happy in himself, always has been, and ever will continue, so—And will you weakly and ridiculously conclude from thence, that it will give any interruption to his internal complacency and tranquillity, that it will put him to any pain or trouble or inconveniency, to watch over the affairs of the universe, and to guide them, from time to time, as he shall see best for the good of the whole? But to a Being, who is every where present, and in whom all his creatures, in the most literal sense of the words, live, and move, and have their existence; to a God, who knows, at all times, what is and what should be, as well as what has been, and to whose almighty will the powers of heaven and earth stand obedient, nothing can be difficult or troublesome. What, indeed, the nature of Gods happiness is, and wherein it consists, it is absolutely impossible for you, in your present state of being, either to describe or even to conceive: only thus much you may be assured of, that this happiness must be entirely consistent with his acting agreeably to his own perfections, that is, with doing what is right and fit to be done in all cases whatever. Man, therefore, being made by God a sensible creature, capable of increasing pleasure and pain, and being moreover furnished by him with the necessary abilities to choose and prefer one sort of conduct before another, has a kind of claim upon him, who sent him into the world, to be taken notice of, if he make such use of his faculties, as they were originally intended to be applied to: and you may be sure, that he will not be disappointed of so reasonable an expectation by a Being, of whose essence it is to do

do always what is right, and just, and good. *Is it, then, supposed to be beneath the dignity of the Lord God Almighty, and derogatory to the excellence of his exalted perfections, to behold what is done in this inferiour system of existence, and to superintend the actions of mankind?* But are not all things equally his works, and *as such*, of consequence, all of them equally entitled to his notice, favour and protection? Or does God take care of worlds, of nations and of kingdoms only? But these greater bodies are made up of particulars, nor can it easily be conceived, how the whole should come under his kind regard, and the parts entirely escape his providential inspection — but with God there is neither whole nor parts; neither great nor small; neither superiour nor inferiour; but all things stand in the same near relation to him as his creatures, and are all equally removed from him, as the eternal and necessarily-existing Being. All things alike call for his fatherly goodness to bless and to preserve them, and all have an equal value and importance given to them, by being stamped with his signature and impression. Upon the whole, if it were not originally rash and unadvised in the Divine Being to make this system, wherein we are placed; surely with as little appearance of reason will it be insinuated, that after having made it, it became unworthy of his providential care and future government.

S E C T. XV.

Great caution to be used in determining which are acts of Gods particular Providence, and which are not.

HOW far, indeed, the Author of this system does immediately interpose in human affairs, and in what particular instances; after what manner

ner he governs the world, and by what secret workings of his power and providence in *extraordinary conjunctures*, over-rules the general laws of nature and usual operation of second causes, giving them a new direction adapted to particular cases, it is not for weak and narrow-sighted mortals, (who have only a partial view of his dispensations, and know nothing of the true situation, circumstances and relations of things,) to conceive, much less should we presume peremptorily to pronounce upon so intricate and profound a subject. But tho' it does not become us conceitedly to lay down rules for the divine conduct according to our imperfect notions of right and wrong, of order and disorder, rashly to wield the thunderbolts of heaven, and expressly to say, what is the finger of God and what is not: yet may we with certainty conclude from the contemplation of the divine attributes; from the invariable uniformity observed in the motions of the material world for so many thousand years together; and from the general regularity of the moral creation, (notwithstanding the continual disorder and confusion, which might naturally be expected to flow from the free actions of free agents,) that the Supreme Being has never, in fact, withdrawn his presence from the world, but has always persisted to direct and govern it in the wisest and best manner, both with regard to the parts as well as the whole. That a Being of infinite power, intelligence, goodness and justice cannot be an indolent, vacant, unattentive, or partial spectator of what is perpetually passing before him; that he must always do what is right, best, and most fitting upon the whole; that he cannot look with the same eye of indifference upon those rational beings, who endeavour to fulfil the end of their creation, and to act agreeably to what they have, by meditation,
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found to be his will, and upon those who follow no rule of action but the impetuous dictates of their passions, and who live to, and for, themselves only, without caring for their Maker or their fellow-creatures—thus far we are certain, and this is amply sufficient for all the solid purposes of human life. All beyond this is clouds and thick darkness. And to imagine that we know more than this; to imagine that we are able to explain the manner of Gods Providence, and to pronounce who are the favourites of heaven and who its enemies, can serve no other purpose, than to introduce arrogance and presumption on the one hand, or melancholy and despair on the other. Nor let us forget to add upon this leading and most interesting subject, that wherever the notion of a God has prevailed; that in whatever clime his existence has been believed whether barbarous or civilized, there also the persuasion of a super-intending Providence, both general and particular, has always been received and entertained. The two ideas indeed can never be separated without mutually destroying each other. *A God without a Providence is an useless, joyless, and unmeaning God; it is the phantom of Epicurus, it is the infinite-insensible, and unintelligible of atheists.*

S E C T. XVI.

To those who sincerely believe a God and Providence it cannot possibly be matter of indifference how, or in what manner they act.

HERE then you will do well to pause a moment, and with the most attentive seriousness to recollect and examine, how far your review has hitherto carried you, and whether there be any necessity for you to proceed farther in your religious enquiries.

enquiries. You are fully convinced, you say, that *there is a God*; and that *this God is a Being of all-conceivable perfections, self-existent, eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, every-where-present, all-wise and all-good*; and that *his attributes are of the same kind with the qualities of a similar denomination in man, though infinitely differing from them in degree.* You

say, moreover, that you sincerely believe, that the *Lord God Almighty, who made the world, still continues to preside over it by his Providence, and to rule immediately in the kingdoms of men, whenever he sees proper, by particular and extraordinary interposals of his power.*

And can you imagine, that nothing farther is required of you in consequence of these principles, and that *these fundamental articles of faith* were not intended to have their proper effect, weight, and influence upon your reasonable actions? Can you think, that the being or not-being of such a God, as you have here acknowledged, is a matter of mere indifference with regard to your conduct, and that you need never enquire after, or consult the divine will in any thing you do? Can you persuade yourself, that all sorts of behaviour are equally agreeable to the Deity, and that he is neither pleased nor displeased, whatever rule of action his reasonable creatures may choose to pursue?

If these are your real, your mature and deliberate sentiments, be consistent with yourself, and say farther, (what you cannot but think,) that you were sent into the world merely to eat, to drink and sleep; merely to indulge your sensual appetites; to provide yourself with a successor, and then to mix for ever with the unfeeling atoms of dust. Say also, that there is no intrinsic excellency in any thing; no common and fixed rule of action for mankind to follow, nor law, but such as the civil magistrate by common consent, for the sake of present peace, shall
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be authoris'd to impose; but that all things are so far right, fitting and eligible, as they shall be more or less productive of immediate pleasure to the agent. Say farther, what is the undoubted consequence of these principles, that the present gratification of your senses ought to be the sole motive, measure and end of all you do. But

if you are shocked, as I doubt not but you are, at a system so utterly irreconcilable to all notions of an infinitely-intelligent, wise and good Creator; if reason, conscience and common-sense, all recoil at the bare recital of opinions so derogatory to the Divine attributes and a superintending Providence; so subversive of your own truest and most lasting happiness; so contrary to the nature and essential differences of things; and so introductory of all kind of mischief, disorder and confusion into society—you will then think it your duty to go on to enquire, with the utmost care and diligence, what sort of behaviour may justly be expected from you towards that God, whom you profess to believe; and you will likewise enquire after what manner this belief ought to influence your conduct both with respect to your self, and to those other reasonable beings, who are all equally the offspring of the same common parent. Nor will you stop here, but as you find yourself irresistibly impelled to desire your own happiness, you will moreover examine, how far the rule of moral action resulting from your relation to God is *productive of your greatest good, and conformable to those natural differences of things*, which you cannot but look upon as certain signs and expressions of the will of their Maker.

S E C T. XVII.

Duties owing to the Deity from such as desire to act consistently with the belief of a God, and his Providence.

*W*ith respect then to the Deity himself—to act consistently with what you profess to believe of him, is constantly to preserve in your mind the highest possible honour, esteem and veneration for his holy name, and to express these reverential sentiments in a suitable regulation of all your outward actions. It is to love him as your best benefactor, to hope in him as the only giver of all good gifts, and to trust in him, and depend upon him, as your surest guide, protector and defender. It is to obey his whole will, to the best of your power, however discovered or made known unto you, and contentedly to submit yourself to all his dispensations, as the sovereign arbiter of all things. You cannot act consistently with your belief of a God, unless all your regard, worship and devotion be payed unto him alone; unless you employ your whole self, all your powers both of soul and body, in his service and for his glory; unless you pray unto him regularly for whatever you may stand in need of hereafter, and return him your most hearty and grateful thanks for all the necessities, conveniences and comforts of life, which he has already bestowed upon you. To preserve in you a lively sense of the transcendent excellency of the Divine nature, to keep up a due acknowledgement of your constant dependance upon him, and to put you in continual remembrance of your various obligations to him, *the institution of prayer and the observation of an external worship are extremely useful, and, consequently, very rational expedients.* Only let all your
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outward acts of devotion and piety be practised in a manner, reconcileable to the other duties which you owe to God, namely, to an awful reverence of him, which consists in the inward sentiments wholly, and an absolute resignation to his will.

S E C T. XVIII.

Duties owing to themselves from such as desire to act consistently with the belief of a God and his Providence.

TO act, moreover, in entire conformity with your belief of an all-wise, and all-good Creator and Governour of the universe, you must take care to keep *yourself*, at all times, in such a frame, and disposition both of body and mind, as may be consistent with the perpetual submission, trust, obedience and veneration, both external and internal, which you owe to the most excellent of Beings; you must restrain your appetites with temperance; you must regulate your passions with moderation; you must apply yourself to the business of your station in the world with attention, industry and contentment; and above all things, *you must endeavour to preserve the being, which He has given to you, as long as you are able.* In the highest degree, therefore, does that person affront the goodness of his Creator, and disobey the wisdom of the supreme disposer of all events, who, disgusted and weary of living, voluntarily deprives himself of his existence. Nor let the discontented *self-murderer* think to excuse or mitigate this insolent act of rebellion against Providence, by pretending that he could no longer support the misery of the situation in which his Maker has placed him. For the man, who acts under the influence of a thorough belief, trust and confidence in the power, wisdom

and mercies of God, will resignedly acquiesce in all the dispensations of Providence, whatever struggles it may cost him to obtain the victory over himself: he will always hope the best, and, in his utmost grief and distress, will wait with patience, till the appointed time of his deliverance shall come for that good Being, without whose knowledge he could not have suffered, and who alone has authority regularly to dismiss him from his station.

S E C T. XIX.

Duties owing to their fellow-creatures from such as desire to act consistently with the belief of a God and his Providence.

IN the last place, to act consistently with your belief of God and his moral attributes, is to treat *your fellow-creatures*, as children of the same common parent, with affection and respect. It is to be kind, gentle and tender-hearted towards them, as knowing them to be possessed of the same feelings, appetites, passions and reason as yourself, and created for the same gracious purposes. It is not only to render unto every man what is strictly due unto him by the laws of your country, but likewise to act by him, in all cases, as you would wish to be done unto in similar circumstances. It is to encourage that natural disposition both *to will* and *to do good* unto every man, which you feel, amongst your other passions, implanted in your breast by the Author of your being, and never to neglect a proper opportunity, agreeably to your situation and circumstances in life, to assist and advance the real welfare and happiness of a fellow-creature. It is to be animated

mated with a holy desire to imitate God, and to be as like him as you possibly can, by making perpetual advances in justice, mercy, fidelity, truth and beneficence. For tho' there undoubtedly is, and always will be, an infinite distance and disparity of degree between the most sublime and exalted human benevolence and the divine: yet it is true, likewise, and self-evident, that so far as any reasonable creature acts upon a motive or principle of willing the happiness of other beings, so far does he, in a strict and proper sense, resemble or imitate God; and to do this must be the duty, and will be the perpetual ambition of every person, who esteems and reverences the Deity, as the standard of all that is truly happy, and truly perfect.*

S E C T. XX.

A system of duties to God, ourselves, and our fellow-creatures, similar to the foregoing, arises from the consideration and pursuit of our greatest happiness.

SUCH, then, must be the general tenour of your behaviour, if you are resolved to act consistently with what you profess to believe concerning the Divine Being, and his attributes. Nor will a different system of duty or moral-action offer itself to your inspection and pursuit, if you seriously examine your own nature, powers, propensities and inclinations, and attend to the instigations of that invincible desire of happiness, which

* See notes on Lord Bolingbroke's Philosophy, by Mr. Bulkley.

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is ever uppermost in your mind, and is the ruling principle of your life. Upon the supposition *that you were made to be happy, and that happiness is the great end of your being*, (as undoubtedly it is relatively to yourself) nothing certainly can be your duty, that is, you cannot be morally obliged either to do, or to forbear any thing, which does not some way or other (either in its own nature, or by positive institution) contribute to this end: and, consequently, every thing which does so contribute must be your reasonable rule of action, and ought to be uniformly observed by you as the indispensable law of your being. You must therefore, love the Lord your God with all your soul; you must devoutly reverence his holy name: you must put your whole trust and confidence in him, and endeavour to act agreeably to his will in all things.—You must, moreover, labour to subdue your appetites, and to reduce your irregular passions to the obedience of right reason. Nor must you neglect any opportunity of being kind, affectionate, just and gentle towards your fellow-creatures. For, if you consult experience, if you consult your own feelings, if you consult the universal voice, you will be soon convinced, that these are the best, the most natural, and indeed the only effectual means to obtain that solid ease, peace and satisfaction of mind, which is the surest foundation of true and lasting happiness. To reverence the almighty Maker of heaven and earth, to depend upon his goodness for a blessing upon your endeavours, punctually to obey his commandments, to be grateful to him for past benefits, to pray for future mercies, and resignedly to acquiesce in all his dispensations, is the most infallible method you can pursue to become his friend, and to entitle yourself to his favour and protection. By temperance,

rance, industry and sobriety, by moderating your enjoyment of the good, and by bearing with patience the evil things of life, you not only preserve your body as free from pain and disease, as the intractability of its material composition will permit, but you also acquire that content and tranquillity of soul, which are the genuine fruit of a self-approved conduct. And will any one deny, that the practice of universal justice, equity and benevolence is not as direct and adequate a means to obtain the good-will of our fellow-creatures, and to promote the general welfare, as any physical cause or geometrical operation is fitted to produce its natural effect?*

S E C T. XXI.

A similar system of duties results from the contemplation of the nature and essential differences of things.

H E R E, then, you have exactly the same rule of moral action pointed out and prescribed unto you from the consideration of your own nature, interest, and happiness, as you found before to result from your idea of God and his attributes, only pressed upon you with the additional strength of a new obligation. Nor, indeed, could the event of your enquiry possibly be otherwise. For had one system of duty arisen from your belief of a God, and had a contrary rule of action been required of you from the necessity, which you feel yourself under, of willing and pursuing your own

* See *Evidences on natural and revealed religion*, by Dr. Clarke.

happiness, you would have found yourself divided between the operation of two contrary obligations: you would have been obliged to will your own happiness, and not to will it at the same time, which had been an imperfection in your original constitution, utterly irreconcilable with all notions of an intelligent, wise, and good Creator. For the same reason, therefore, you may be fully assured, that *upon contemplating the nature of things themselves and their essential differences, a rule of reasonable action, similar in all respects to that which you have already investigated, will present itself to your view.* For there is a certain uniformity in all Gods designs and works; they all amicably conspire and co-operate to the same ends; they all draw together the same way; nor can they possibly lead you, by contrary routes, to the pursuit of duty and happiness. And, accordingly, to refuse to honour and obey that God, from whose power, wisdom and goodness you received your being, and to whom you are continually indebted for your preservation, is to be guilty of an equal absurdity, and inconsistency in practice, as if you had denied in speculation, that the effect owes any thing to its cause, or that the whole is bigger than a part. So again, to refuse to deal with all men equitably, and with every man as you desire he should deal with you, is to be guilty of the same unreasonableness and self-contradiction, as if you had affirmed one number or quantity to be equal to another, and yet that that other, at the same time, is not equal to the first. Thus also he who acknowledges himself obliged to the practice of certain duties towards God and man, and yet takes no care, either to preserve his own being, or, not to preserve himself in such a state and temper of body and mind, as may best enable him to perform those

those duties, is altogether as inexcuseable and absurd, as he who, in any other matter, should affirm one thing, at the same time that he denies another, without which the former could not possibly be true; or should undertake one thing at the same time that he obstinately omits another, without which the former is by no means practicable. To suffer yourself, therefore, to be governed by arbitrary humours and rash passions; and to treat things, as distinguished from one another merely by the natural good or evil, which immediately accompanies them, relatively to yourself—is not this, in reality, to set up your own unreasonable self-will, in opposition to the true nature and difference of things? Is not this to endeavour, as much as in you lies, to make things to be what they are not, and what they cannot be? And can there be a higher presumption and insolence, as well as a greater absurdity, imagined? It is to act in express contradiction to the understanding, reason and judgement, which God has given to you, on purpose to enable you to discern the difference between things; it is to attempt to destroy that order, by which the universe subsists; it is to offer the greatest indignity conceivable to the wise Creator, who made all things as they are, and continues to govern every thing, according to the laws of their several natures. In a word, all wilful deviation from, and perversion of, right is the same absurdity in moral matters, as it would be in natural things to pretend to alter the proportions of numbers, and to take away the demonstrable relations and properties of mathematical figures; it is to make light darkness, and darkness light, to call sweet bitter, and bitter sweet. *

* See *Evidences of natural and revealed religion*, by Dr. Clarke. Prop. 1.

S E C T. XXII.

To follow a system of duties thus founded, is to follow the will of God, and to obey his commands.

THE conclusion, therefore, is as indubitable, as any demonstration in geometry can be, that, as a reasonable creature, you are under a moral necessity, or obligation, to conform to a system of conduct clearly marked out and prescribed unto you by the nature of God himself, the nature of man, and the nature of things; that is, to a system of duty expressly commanded and sanctified by the positive will and appointment of the universal Creator. For at the same time that almighty God, *by creating*, declared it to be his will, that things should exist in the manner they do, preferably to all other ways and manners, he pronounced to the whole world, that all such moral obligations, as are the result of the essential differences and relations of things, are likewise his positive will and command. At the same time that the *Deity so constituted the nature of man*, as to be able by searching to find out and know his Creator, and, to a certain degree, his attributes, he manifestly declared, that it is his positive will and command, that he should behave himself, in all respects, agreeably to such knowledge. At the same time that the benevolent Author of this system implanted in mankind an invariable and invincible desire to pursue and attain happiness, and furnished them with the necessary abilities to examine, select, and approve the most effectual means leading to this great end of their being; he declared in the most intelligible language, that it is his positive will and command, that they should

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use the powers of their minds for this purpose, and follow that rule of action, which their best and improved reason told them would be most conducive to it. For where an essentially-wise and intelligent being acts with design, and has power sufficient to execute his design, his general will and intention may be as plainly and clearly perceived and understood from what he does, as from what he says. Seeing therefore, that the nature of things, the nature of man, and the nature of God, all, as you have allowed, with united voice speak the same significant and interesting language; and all, with the most entire harmony and uniformity, direct you to the same rules of moral action; you cannot but conclude, that rules of morality thus promulgated, thus recommended and thus enforced, ought to be highly revered, and punctually obeyed, *as the plan of infinite wisdom, as the express will and unerring command of the universal Creator, as the dictates of right reason and the laws of nature, as virtue and natural religion.* Rules of duty and moral action thus founded have no connection at all with the *civil magistrate* and his sanctions, any farther than as they hold out the most perfect exemplars for him to copy after in his institutions—they are indeed unchangeable, universal, and equally obligatory upon all mankind, at all times and in all places, as far as they are able to discover them by the use of their rational faculties; and as far as their necessary avocations and interruptions will furnish them with opportunities to make themselves acquainted with them.

S E C T. XXIII.

There is a sufficient sanction, either natural or positive, annexed to the divine laws.

BEING thus convinced, that there is a certain rule of moral action to be pursued by you, as you are a rational creature able to know God, to discern wherein your truest happiness consists, and to investigate the essential differences of things; or, in other words, *being fully convinced that there is a law and religion of nature sanctified by the will, and pressed upon your conscience by the Author of your being*——you may now proceed one step farther in your enquiry, and with assurance conclude, that as far as you use your best endeavours to find out, and to act agreeably to this rule or law of your nature; so far will you be able to attain the end of your being, in a proportionably larger share of perfection and happiness: and, on the other hand, that so far as you deviate from, oppose, and act contrary to this rule or law of your being, so far will you detract from your perfection, and fall short of your greatest happiness. For vain are your past reasonings upon the being and attributes of God, upon the nature of man, and the differences of things; nor will any conclusions, in favour of morality, drawn from your notions of good order, justice and government, be admitted, if there be not a sufficient sanction, either natural or positive, annexed to the law of your being; if those persons, who make a rational use of the power which they have over their actions, and endeavour to live conformably to what they know of the will of their Creator, are not, upon the whole, happier than those who neglect and despise it.

it. To assert the contrary, is to assert, that rewards and punishments are not of the essence of a law; it is to assert, that God almighty is a legislator without authority, a governour without rights, and that his laws have no force; it is to assert, that a wise and good God will not, in all instances, do what is just and right. You may therefore argue with yourself upon this very interesting subject in the following manner; and, as your arguments cannot fail of convincing your unprejudiced understanding, it will certainly be your truest wisdom to suffer your reasoning to have its full influence upon your moral practice.

Has the God of nature really given to mankind a rule of moral action? I confess that he has. Does he expect that this rule, as far as it is known, should be attended to, complied with, and observed by them? Without doubt he does, or his conduct would be to the last degree trifling. Can it then possibly be imagined, that the consequence of my actions, with regard to my happiness or misery, will be exactly the same, whether I voluntarily break the law of my being, or punctually observe it? Certainly not; unless I can persuade myself to believe, what I find to be impossible, namely, that Gods laws are no laws, or that they are left naked and defenceless, and may be neglected and violated with impunity.

S E C T. XXIV.

If a proportionate increase of happiness do not always follow the observation of the divine laws in this life, there must be a future state, wherein this irregularity will be corrected.

BUT this argument may be viewed in another light, and, in a point of this great importance to your moral conduct and lasting happiness, you cannot

not take too much pains to inform yourself of the truth. If then God beholds what passes in the world, as you profess to believe that he does, you cannot but conclude, either that he is pleased with those persons, who, out of a conscientious regard to his will, obey the laws which he has given to them, and is displeased with those who take no notice of them to do them—or that he looks upon both with an eye of perfect indifference.—But, if this latter be supposed to be the case, must it not be said by those who are of this opinion, either that there is no essential difference between the behaviour of these two sorts of men, (which is absolutely to confound truth with falsehood, and to destroy the fundamental distinction between right and wrong, good and evil) or that God does not look upon, and judge of them, as they really are, than which a greater absurdity cannot be conceived.

But if God approves of one sort of conduct in his creatures more than another, as he cannot but do, if he be intelligent, wise and good; the consequence is indisputable, that he will likewise find some way or other to signify his approbation, or dislike, by making the proper distinctions between the actors; and that those persons, whose behaviour has been agreeable to him, will, upon the whole, be happier than those whose behaviour has not been agreeable to him. For to approve the conduct of his creatures, or not to approve it, to be pleased or displeased with them, will be entirely the same, equally unintelligible and useless to any purpose of truth and goodness, if such internal judgement of the Deity be not, some time or other, suitably accompanied with external marks of distinction.

If therefore the sanction of rewards and punishments, *the sanction of happiness and misery*, which you are now convinced must necessarily

necessarily be annexed the one to the obedience, the other to the disobedience of the law of nature and reason, does not always, and regularly, take place in the present state of your existence, as perhaps it does not, in a single instance, in an exact proportion to the merit or demerit of the agent) if the ways of Providence are not universally equal in this life, (as it is impossible they should be *in a world of matter and free-will* without the perpetual intervention of infinite wisdom, of which continual intervention there are small appearances) you cannot but conclude; (if God be the common parent, king and lawgiver,) that there will be another state after the present, wherein your existence will be either continued or renewed unto you, and wherein exact justice will be rendered unto every man, according to his behaviour in this life.

To say therefore that there is no sanction of the law of nature, otherwise than as it is confirmed, recommended and enforced by the civil institutions of your country; or as inveterate custom has accidentally associated the ideas of pleasure and pain to one manner of acting more than to another: to say that all things come alike to all, and that the same chance happeneth to the man, who balances his passions by the rules of right reason, and to him, who never thinks of God but to blaspheme his name, or of his fellow-creatures, but as they may be made useful for the indulgence of his unrestrained appetites: and to add, moreover, that the present confusion of happiness and misery will never be rendered more regular and equitable—is to assert, that all your actions are indifferent both in themselves, and in their consequences; that there is no law of your being, or none worthy your attention and regard; that there is no virtue nor vice, no morality nor irreligion—it is, indeed, effectually
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to banish all notions of a wise, just and good Being from the creation, inspection and government of the world ; it is, in reality, to assert, that there is no God, and that all things are left to the senseless domination of chance, fate and confusion.

S E C T. XXV.

The existence of the soul in a future state is inseparably connected with the being of an all-powerful, wise, just and good God.

THE being of a powerful, intelligent, just and good God, and the existence of the human soul in a future state, are so indissolubly connected together, that they cannot be disjoined without their mutual destruction. Cases, at least, may easily be conceived, wherein it will be impossible even for omnipotent wisdom to do what is right, equal and fit to be done, but upon the supposition of a future state of rewards and punishments. For are there not persons in the world, (may not such be imagined with great appearance of probability, tho' we should not be able precisely to determine who they are) are there not persons, I ask, in the world, who never reflect seriously upon the Deity and his attributes, or pay the least reverence, regard, or duty to his holy name? Who build their fortune and their happiness upon the misery and ruin of their fellow-creatures? Who follow no law, but the impetuous cravings of their sensual appetites, nor attend to any consequences of their actions, but such as the civil constitutions of their country may, by chance, have annexed to them? Whose hours, to all appearance, pass away in one continual round of mirth and jollity, without ever feeling the least inward compunction and uneasiness?

easiness? And shall it be in the power of such persons to enjoy their unreasonable and unsocial pleasures pure and unbated, and, at last, entirely to substract themselves from the hands of divine justice? It is in their power effectually to do this, by adding yet another, and greater deviation from the law of their being, to all their former transgressions, namely, by putting an end to their existence, before the evil days come on, and the natural consequences of their irregularities begin to lay hold of them—— So, on the other hand, have there not been frequent instances of persons, who have been extremely wretched in this life, merely on account of their conscientious adherence to the law of their nature, that is, to the will of their God? Have there not been religious and benevolent men, the sum of whose misery, in certain periods of their existence, has exceeded the sum of their happiness? And shall it not be within the power of their merciful Creator; shall it not be within the reach of infinite goodness to compensate them for the sufferings, which they have undergone merely on account of their piety? On the contrary, shall it be in the power of the most abandoned of mankind to rob them of the reward due to their fidelity, submission and patience; and to convert even their obedience to the dictates of their consciences, and the commands of their God, into so many causes of augmenting their misery, without a possibility of compensation or relief? Deny thy God, says the insolent tyrant to a good man, who, from his infancy, perhaps, has already been conversant with pain and grief; pay thy religious homage to stocks and stones; commit the most horrid contradictions to what thou acknowledgest to be the law of thy being; otherwise, expect a lingering death of
F. wretchedness,

wretchedness, attended with the sharpest torments, which the most cruel invention can inflict. Far from complying with these injurious commands, or departing, in the least, from his integrity, the afflicted martyr, full of resignation and relying entirely upon the future goodness of his God, resolutely meets his fate in all its terrors. Where, then, in this case, is the reward either natural or positive, which ought to be annexed to the observation of the divine law? Even the almighty God himself, the parent, the king, the righteous lawgiver of mankind, can here do nothing either to recompence the misery of the unhappy sufferer, or to vindicate the honour of his violated laws, *if there be not another life after this*. Hard, indeed, it is for us precisely to ascertain who are the really-happy, and who the really-miserable in this world; as hard as it is for us to determine who are the sincerely-good, and who the impenitently-wicked: but however ignorant we may be supposed to be, and apt to mistake in our judgements concerning the true state and condition of mankind; yet we are assured, that God cannot err nor be mistaken in these matters, and that the Being, to whom all hearts are open and from whom no secrets are hid, can never be at a loss to know, where and how to bestow his rewards and punishments, according to the strictest rules of distributive justice.

S E C T. XXVI.

A future state proved from the nature of the human soul, its capacity, powers, instincts and affections.

IN exact correspondence with these deductions from the being and attributes of God, from the necessity of vindicating the honour and enforcing

forcing the obligation of the divine laws by the sanction of rewards and punishments, and from the apparent inequality in the present administration of Providence—in strict correspondence, I say, with the conclusions drawn from these several topicks in proof of our future existence in another world, and in confirmation of them, may be added the various arguments taken from the powers, passions and capacity of the soul, joined to the conduct of the divine wisdom observed in the general order and economy of things. It is in truth impossible deliberately to survey, and seriously to contemplate the nature and various operations of that principle within us, which moves and animates the human frame, and is indeed our life, and not be fully convinced, that it must be something entirely distinct from the body, which it governs, that it cannot be *matter*. Abstruse as this subject is generally supposed to be, and remote from common apprehension; yet surely it requires no great reach of capacity, nor extent of literature to understand the following questions, and to return satisfactory answers to them.

Are we not all conscious to ourselves of some active principle lodged within us, able to conceive, to comprehend, and, with attention, to view ideas; to compare them one with another, and to judge how far they agree together, and wherein they disagree? Is it not frequently in our power to recall to our remembrance things long since past, and, sometimes, even to form probable opinions of what may happen hereafter? Are we not able to digest our ideas into a proper order and method; to reduce them into their several classes, to correct them when we have reason to think that our senses have been deceived in the transmission of them, to draw conclusions from them, and to form general notions

and propositions from particular perceptions? Are we not conscious also, that this same *internal power* (call it by what name you will, *soul*, or *mind*, or *spirit*) enjoys the most perfect freedom of determining and acting; and that it knows how to will and choose the good, both natural and moral, and to refuse the evil? But are these the properties, the qualities, the perfections of *body essentially inert and unactive*? of every the minutest atom which makes up the infinite aggregate of matter? They must be so, if they are the properties of *matter, as such*.

Can it be conceived that *matter*, senseless in itself and in its own nature, however figured, or moved, however subtilized or fermented, and how many ages soever agitated, can become pleasure or pain, desire or aversion? Is it not, indeed, utterly impossible, that that penetrating understanding and accurate judgement; that strength of memory and readiness of wit; that justice, prudence and magnanimity; that charity and beneficence to mankind; that ingenuous fear and awful love of God; that experienced and still-increasing insight into the works of nature; that inexhausted fountain of eloquence, and those exalted discoveries of mathematical theorems, which are altogether the most useful and ornamental distinctions of our species—is it not, I ask, perfectly impossible, that effects such as these should proceed from the blind shufflings and casual clashings of atoms? We must conclude, therefore, if any thing may ever be concluded from the most clear and undoubted principles, that *the soul of man*, that *the active power within us*, is something totally distinct from matter, and, in its own nature, entirely independent of it—we must conclude that the human soul (without perplexing ourselves with intricate questions concerning the nature of its substance, its union with the body, and its manner of acting with and upon

upon it) is so far made in the image of its Creator, as to be a spirit or immaterial: and, consequently, that it is extremely probable, that when the body shall again return to that dust, from whence it was originally taken, the soul shall still survive, (unhurt amidst the wreck of matter,) clothed with all its former consciousness, and in full capacity both of enjoying pleasure and enduring pain, as usual. How far, indeed, the omnipotence of God may be able to give to any particular system, or combination, of matter the faculty of thinking: or, whether it be not a thing, in its own nature, absolutely impossible to super-induce consciousness upon any mass of matter, made up of infinitely-small, solid and extended atoms, all of them equally qualified with the same essential properties, we need not be over-sollicitous to enquire; both as the nature, truth and sanctions of virtue will not be, in the least, affected by the determination, and as those persons, who argue for the possibility (rather than the probability) of such a super-induction, give up the question, which we have been contending for, namely, *that matter, of itself, is wholly incapable of becoming a human soul, of becoming knowledge, appetite and passion, without the immediate interposition of almighty power.*

S E C T. XXVII.

The argument in favour of a future state taken from the powers, passions and affections of the soul, viewed in another light.

BUT the arguments in proof of our existence in a future state, taken from the nature of the human soul, its capacity, powers, instincts

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and affections, may, perhaps, carry still farther force and conviction with them, when viewed in a somewhat different light; and, upon a subject of this leading influence and importance, nothing should be omitted, which may possibly have an effect to illumine the understanding of the doubtful, to remove their real scruples, and to persuade them of that happy immortality in another state, which will certainly attend the regular discharge of their duty in the present. That God can do nothing in vain, that the supreme wisdom never acts but for some end and design, the whole system of nature every where proclaims in the most intelligent language—why then all that pomp and profusion of perfections, which have been bestowed upon mankind? Why that earnest desire, that universal sense, expectation and presage of a future state, that perpetual longing after immortality, which are so radically interwoven in the constitution of the human mind? Why that secret dread and horror at the apprehension of falling into nothing? Why that pleasing consciousness and silent satisfaction upon acting agreeably to the dictates of right reason, and the will of God? Why that anguish and remorse, which is always felt upon the first commission even of the most private wickedness? Are these common notions, these interesting sentiments, these anticipations of futurity, these natural propensities (as they may be properly called) implanted in us for no wise purpose, and given to us with no view, and for no end at all? *They must be implanted in us for no wise purpose, and given to us for no sufficient end, unless there be a life after this,* in which we are nearly interested, and of which they are intended to be a sort of earnest, a pledge, an admonition and assurance. Man, considered

considered merely with relation to his present existence, seems to be sent into the world only to eat, to drink, to sleep and to propagate his kind : he provides himself with a successor, and immediately quits his post to make room for him. But can it, with the least appearance of probability, be imagined, that an infinitely-wise and good Being would make such glorious creatures for so low and mean a purpose ? Can he delight in the production of such abortive intelligences, such short-lived reasonable creatures ? Is it, indeed, possible for us to conceive, that the faculties of the human mind, which are capable, by their original frame and constitution, of being exalted to so high a degree of perfection, and of receiving new improvements to all eternity, should fall away into nothing, almost as soon as created ? Is it, indeed, possible for us really to believe, that a thinking being, who is in a perpetual progress of improvement, and travelling on from perfection to perfection, after having just looked abroad into the works of its Creator, and made a few discoveries of his infinite knowledge, goodness and power, must perish at its first setting out, and in the very beginning of its enquiries ? In vain shall we search for the consummate wisdom, which shines through all Gods other works, in the formation of man, unless we contemplate this world, as only a nursery for the next ; and can persuade ourselves, that the several generations of rational creatures, which rise up and disappear in such quick successions, are only to receive the first rudiments of existence here, and afterwards to be transplanted into some more friendly climate, where they may spread and flourish to all eternity. To view the soul as still going on from knowledge to knowledge, and from virtue to virtue ; to con-

sider, that by its original make and constitution it is destined to shine for ever with new accessions of glory, and to brighten from everlasting to everlasting, is not only extremely agreeable to its original disposition, affections and apprehensions, but helps also to excite and confirm in us just and sublime ideas of the almighty Father of spirits.*

What, indeed, will be the *nature of that future state*, to which we are every moment hastening; what the exact measure of happiness, which shall be distributed to good men in it, and what the precise quantity of misery, which shall be the lot of evil men; when the future judgement shall commence, by whose ministration, and after what manner, it shall be conducted, we can know nothing with certainty by the use of our intellectual faculties, such science being too high and too remote from all our present ideas of sense and reflection for mere man to attain unto it——Only thus much we may be assured of, that a Being of essential wisdom, goodness, holyness and justice, will always do what is right, fit, and best to be done upon the whole.

S E C T. XXVIII.

Human life ought not to be treated as a jest; nor the dignity of the human nature to be vilified.

TO look, therefore, upon the human life as a jest, and either contemptuously to treat the rational species as a superiour order of brutes; or maliciously to ridicule them, as so many mimic

* See 8th vol. of the *Spectator*.

actors strutting their several uninteresting parts upon the changeful theatre of the world, is to dig up and to destroy the very foundations of all duty and religion, and to encourage confusion and every work of unrighteousness; it is to introduce an absolute indifferency with regard to moral good and evil; it is utterly to reject the intervention of an understanding, wise and good Being in the formation of man; it is to regard this system, and all things in it, as the undesigned effect of hazard, or the unmeaning operation of fate and necessity. For if God be our creator, governour and law-giver, it is impossible to conceive, that he will not interest himself (if we may use the expression) in the work of his own hands; it is impossible to conceive, that he would form such a creature as man is, sensible, rational, and capable of making perpetual improvements in knowledge and virtue, for no other purpose, but that, after a momentary existence upon earth full of trouble, anxiety and disappointment, he should mix again for ever with the unfeeling clods of the church-yard; or that he would have furnished him with such exquisite abilities both of body and mind, only to till the ground from whence he was taken, or to make provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof. It is the finger of an all-wise Being so visibly appearing in the constitution of man, which gives to him all his dignity, importance and distinction—and let those, who seem so fond of vilifying the human kind, who are still speaking in the most abject terms of their lowliness, their nothingness and the infinite disproportion between the creature and Creator, consider well with themselves, whether their humility be not affected, deceitful and hypocritical; whether it be not put on with a view to shake off the restraints of religion,
and,

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and, by pretending to look upon themselves and all that they can do as beneath the divine notice, to leave themselves no other rules to direct their actions, than such as their licentious appetites and passions may suggest to them. To know that life is a jest, and to be assured that all its duties, offices and engagements are works of indifference, mere mockeries, and have nothing serious in them, we must wait till the great teacher, *Death*, has dropped the curtain, and the last scene shall be entirely closed. But if we know any thing at all, after that tremendous period shall be passed, it will certainly be, that *life was a business of the utmost moment and concern*; that it was entrusted to us by our infinitely-wise and good Creator for the most weighty and important purposes; that we must render a strict account of the use, which we have made in it, of our time and talents; and that an eternity of happiness, or an eternity of misery depends upon it.

S E C T. XXIX.

It is proposed to enquire, whether the system of faith and duty here delineated be the offspring of reason alone; or owe its origin to an extraordinary interposition of heaven.

BUT will it not be here demanded by serious, well-informed and devout enquirers, from whence we originally derived the system of virtue and religion, which we have been above describing? Will it not be asked by those persons, who are in search of the whole will of God, as the best rule and measure of religious obedience; by those persons, who, free from passion, prejudice and prepossession, have nothing else in view but the investigation of truth,

truth, the uniform discharge of their duty and the acquisition of their most perfect happiness, whether we have not laid too great a stress upon the powers of the human mind in the deductions which we have been making? Whether we have not ascribed rules of action, doctrines, and motives of obedience to the mere force and authority of reason, which were originally deduced from a very different source? Rules, indeed, doctrines and motives entirely agreeable to the perceptions and conclusions of reason, when previously made known to it by other means, but which Reason never could have discovered in so clear, distinct and satisfactory a manner by its own strength; which, in fact, it never did discover by its own strength, if any credit may be given to the moral history of mankind.

The system of faith and duty, which has been above delineated and recommended to us, *say these impartial enquirers*, we acknowledge to be, in all respects, conformable to the principles of human reason—to be indeed little less than strictly demonstrable by it: its foundations are so deeply laid in the nature of God himself, the nature of man, and the nature of things, that those persons are wholly without excuse, who sunk in inattention, indolence and indifference, use not their best endeavours to acquaint themselves with it, and to act agreeably to it. But the interesting question, which we would humbly propose to be examined and decided, is, *whether this system of faith and duty be, in fact, the genuine offspring of unassisted reason?* or, whether it must not be ascribed to a different source, to some higher and superiour cause; that is, whether it owes not its origin to an immediate and extraordinary interposition of heaven in favour of mankind?

S E C T. XXX.

Causes for making this enquiry. What method must be taken to inform ourselves of the real strength of reason in moral and religious matters.

AND this question, *say they*, is the more necessary to be clearly determined, that we may the better *know ourselves*, our real strength and weakness ; that we may not mistake the object of our thanks and gratitude, and by looking up to *Reason*, as sufficient to conduct us to our greatest happiness, make it the undeserving idol of our adoration ; whilst we teach ourselves, by degrees, to become less sensible of our immediate and continual dependence upon the Deity for every thing that we now are, or expect to be hereafter. For as, on the one hand, we would not be thought to detract from the native brightness of that internal light, which was given by God himself to enlighten every man, who cometh into the world : so neither would we, by imputing too great a lustre to it, contribute to lessen the legislative authority of the Deity, to weaken his moral providence and government in the kingdoms of men, and to remove those additional and more cogent motives of love, duty and obedience, which we shall think ourselves, as his most highly-favoured creatures, obliged to pay to the divine laws, if, upon examination, it should appear, that they were really communicated to us by an extraordinary interposition from heaven. Now to know what reason is able to effectuate in the great business of virtue and religion, and what is beyond its strength to discover, though not to demonstrate after it has been discovered by other means, we must consult fact and
experience,

experience, our best and only guides in researches of this kind: we must take an impartial view of the state of morality in those ages, when the world, probably, had no other light, but that of reason for its direction; and in those nations, where, even to this day, there is no other principle to guide and influence their enquiries. *For the question is not, what reason, aided by supernatural information and instruction, may be able to comprehend, to understand, to explain and to inculcate; but what, in fact, it did not comprehend, understand, explain and inculcate upon these important points, where it has been left entirely to itself, and its own powers. Florid declamations upon the extensiveness, sufficiency and perfection of human reason will carry very little weight with them, when placed in the balance against the universal experience and observation of mankind, against undoubted matter of fact.*

S E C T. XXXI.

Those nations, which had reason only for their guide in matters of religion, were grossly ignorant with respect to the nature of God, his attributes and providence.

IF then, say they, reason, by its native and unassisted force, had so clearly and evidently taught the being of one only God of essential power, wisdom, holyness and goodness, the maker, lawgiver and governour of the universe, as has been above demonstrated, and as we believe; how came it to pass, that the whole world both learned and unlearned, both civilized and barbarous, (the single province of Judea excepted) fell at first into such gross errors concerning this fundamental principle,
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this angular stone, as it may be called, of all virtue and religion, and continued for so many ages in them? If we read the best and most authentick modern accounts of the untutored natives of Africa and America, we shall find whole countries, either without any notions at all of a Deity and his governing providence; or, at least, possessed of such unworthy, ridiculous and absurd ones, as are, perhaps, more derogatory from the excellence of the divine nature than none at all. Nor shall we change the gloomy scene much for the better in this respect, if we consult the history of the polite Chinese (as they are sometimes, affectedly, called) or peruse the ancient volumes of the more learned Greeks and Romans. For even amongst these, the so-much-admired nations of the earth, *we find polytheism and idolatry established by law*; we see whole sects of their deepest thinkers, and most contemplative philosophers, little better than avowed atheists; nor was there any thing so mean, impious and impure, which was not commonly reported, and by too many believed, concerning the numerous host of their Gods. Nor will it, we presume to think, be looked upon as a sufficient reply to what has been here observed of the deplorable ignorance of mankind concerning the nature and attributes of the Deity, when left to themselves, to assert, that there have never been wanting in the world men of profound penetration, who saw into the errors of the popular religion, and who knew better than they thought it expedient either publicly to teach others, or openly to practise themselves; that there never have been wanting men who were well acquainted with the unity of the divine Being, and with other, the most important, truths relating to the almighty Maker of heaven and earth, though they thought it most prudent to co-

ver and conceal such kind of truths from the knowledge of the grosser vulgar, for fear of incurring the enmity of a powerful priesthood, and of drawing upon themselves the vengeance of the civil magistrate. For can it possibly be conceived, that any person, who entertained such right and worthy notions of the Deity, as is here supposed; namely, that he is a Being of all imaginable perfections, that he is but one, that religious worship, (the worship of spirit and truth,) is due only, and to be addressed to him alone; that he governs the universe by his Providence; that he is a rewarder of them who diligently seek him, and a punisher of all those who wilfully and unrepentingly break his laws—Can it be conceived, *we ask*, that any person, who was fully and clearly convinced of these interesting points, would afterwards regularly conform to what he could not but look upon as the height of profaneness and impiety, and pay his daily adoration to stocks, and stones, and to an image made like unto corruptible man, merely because he found idolatry prescribed and established by the laws of his country? whether it was right, in a case of this infinite moment and concern, to hearken unto the magistrate, or to the people, rather than to render unto God the honour due unto his name, surely could be no very difficult matter for persons of courage, understanding, piety and benevolence to determine. If then the philosophers, if the wise men amongst the heathens had been really acquainted with the great and interesting truths relating to the Deity, which have been above demonstrated; must they not, in consequence of this knowledge, have judged it their indispensable duty to have owned and professed them? must they not, at least, have judged it their indispensable duty not to have meanly contradicted, and counter-

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counter-acted, these truths in every instance of their religious worship? As therefore they did not publicly own and profess them, but, on the contrary, uniformly persisted in paying their devotion to the creature rather than to the Creator, may we not safely conclude, (and is it not for the honour of the masters of human reason that we should conclude) that they, in fact, knew very little more concerning them than the rest of their brethren?

S E C T. XXXII.

An equal ignorance appears with regard to the duties which are owing to God, to ourselves and to our fellow-creatures. The religious instructions of the heathens deficient in point of authority.

AN D as there appears, upon a careful examination of the remains of the wisest of the ancient gentile nations, to have been nothing of a truly-spiritual nature in their religious worship; no thanksgivings publicly paid to the Author of their being for the good things, which he had so freely and in such abundance bestowed upon them; no requests offered up for divine assistance in the future performance of their duty; no sorrow for, nor acknowledgement of, past offences to God as their lawgiver and governour, nor prayers to him for forgiveness of their sins—so likewise, *say these impartial enquirers*, do we find the conclusions of reason equally obscure, confused, contradictory and unauthoritative, with regard to the chief end of man, and to the offices of mere humanity, such as were undoubtedly owing to their own preservation and purity, and to the happiness of their fellow-creatures. But even though we should grant, (what cannot however be easily proved) that a complete
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system or rule of religious morality may possibly be collected and deduced from the scattered precepts dispersed up and down in the many volumes of the ancient philosophers, winnowed from their self-contradictions—may we not, however, be permitted to ask, what is there in such a collection to induce and persuade the bulk of mankind (very incompetent judges of the force of abstract reasoning and refined speculations) to receive it as a steady and uniform rule of action ; *to receive it as a divine law*, which they must look upon themselves as under a permanent and unalterable obligation to submit to and obey, even when it most contradicts the gratification of their favourite appetites, passions and inclinations ? In the system of natural duty, as it has been above described, we see the foundation of religious and moral obligation deeply laid in the immutable nature, attributes, and will of an infinitely-wise, all-powerful and benevolent Being; but this was an authority never once thought of, an authority entirely wanting to give force, spirit and activity to the pagan schemes of virtue. Many excellent things, undoubtedly, were spoken by the Grecian Socrates; nor are the writings of the Chinese Confucius destitute of noble maxims and exalted principles of moral conduct: but were Socrates and Confucius lawgivers of mankind, or did they ever pretend to offer any proofs of their divine mission ? Who gave to them, or who gave to Plato, to Aristotle, or to Cicero authority to prescribe laws to the rest of their fellow-creatures ? Had they permission from the God of nature to say, *do this, and you shall live for ever ?* As philosophers, attentive to the voice of reason, their notions, principles and conclusions frequently extort our praise, and call for all our admiration ; though, at other times, we cannot help being shocked at their mistakes,

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takes, and pitying their inequalities, inconsistencies, weakneses and want of judgement. But still their best notions, principles and dictates will be only looked upon as coming from men, liable, as all other men are, to ignorance and continual error; and, consequently, the rest of mankind will think themselves entirely at liberty either to admit or to reject them, as suits their inclination; or, as they think them agreeable to their several lights, interests, passions, prejudices or humours. For what is there that can make the opinions of a mere philosopher a duty to the rest of the world, or render his precepts, as such, morally obligatory? Splendid discourses upon the native beauty, the intrinsic excellence, and the independent reasonableness and fitness of virtue and religion, have been always experienced to be but little understood, and to make but a weak impression upon the more ignorant, thoughtless and unattentive part of the human species, who are generally governed by the insinuations of their senses, rather than by the deductions of reason; and who must have their passions rowed to the uniform practice of moral obedience by the assurance of happiness either present or future.

S E C T. XXXIII.

The deductions of reason uncertain with regard to the immortality of the soul, and a future state of rewards and punishments. What the ancients taught upon this subject was both prejudicial to morality, and not sufficient to conduct them to a well-grounded tranquillity of mind.

SO again, say these impartial enquirers, if unassisted reason had taught the important doctrines of the immortality of the human soul, and of

a future state of rewards and punishments in another life, in as clear, distinct and convincing a manner, as it has been deduced above: how came it to pass, that the whole pagan world fell into such terrible errors, and were guilty of such gross superstitions upon points so essential to the interests of morality and religion? And what sufficient cause can be assigned, why its wisest and best men had so much difficulty to persuade themselves and others, or rather never were able to find arguments fully to satisfy themselves, of its certainty, and of the nature of that happiness and misery, which should be connected with it? We would not, however, be thought to assert, that the heathens knew nothing at all of another life after this: but our meaning is, that those nations which now have, and which formerly had, reason only for their direction in matters of religion (*the inquisitive Greeks and Romans in particular*) had not such a notion of a future state of rewards and punishments, as has been above described, and which could be of the least service to them in confirmation and support of their morality. For whilst it was generally taught amongst them, and, by the vulgar at least, as generally credited, that a happy and glorious immortality had been sometimes conferred upon the most cruel, wicked, impure and flagitious of mortals; nay, that even their deities themselves had been guilty of the most abominable and detestable crimes, what good effects was it possible for such a notion of a future state to produce upon the minds and behaviour of its believers? Could the poets lawgivers and philosophers, the divines of ancient times, reasonably expect, that the people would endeavour to be better, or more virtuous than their heroes or gods themselves had been? But even though it should be grant-

ed, that some few of the heathen philosophers had been able to argue with so much justice from the nature of man, from Gods righteous government of the world, and from universal tradition, as to satisfy themselves of the immortality of their souls, and of the certainty of a future state of retribution: yet could they not, *we think*, draw any conclusions from hence, which would assuredly conduct them to solid peace and a well-grounded tranquillity of mind; they could draw no conclusions from their knowledge of a future judgement, which would not tend to fill them with anxiety and uneasiness, rather than with pleasure. For as they could not but be conscious, that, in many instances, they had *voluntarily* transgressed the law of their being, had acted contrary to the dictates of right reason pointing out their duty to them, and had paid no regard to the essential difference of good and evil as founded in the nature of things, upon what ground could they flatter themselves, that a Being of infinite wisdom, holyness and justice, that the guardian of universal order, would be thoroughly reconciled to them, would pity their frailty, forgive their iniquities, and *reward their imperfect obedience with eternal happiness*? They might, indeed, have recourse to repentance and amendment of life, as the most probable means to avert the severity of the divine anger, (though they seem to have had very little notion of that necessary part of true repentance, which consists in a sincere sorrow for past transgressions) and endeavour to be more punctual hereafter in the discharge of their duty: but how far this alone would operate towards blotting out the guilt of crimes already committed, and towards restoring them to the entire favour of their sovereign lawgiver and judge, without some previous provision made for vindicating the honour of his laws and the authority

authority of his government, they could not, *we think*, with certainty conclude from any principles of right reason, which they appear to have been acquainted with.

S E C T. XXXIV.

If reason be not able to instruct us in our whole duty, it is insufficient to exalt us to the highest degree of happiness which we are created capable of enjoying.

WE readily grant, indeed, that mankind were never obliged to practice what no diligence of their own could previously inform them of; we readily grant, that the human duty can not be more extensive, than are the ways of knowing it, and that every one shall be accepted, in the final day of account, according to what he hath, and not according to what he hath not—But this is not the question before us at present; nor are we now enquiring, whether the right use of reason has not always been able to preserve those, who had this principle only for their guide in religious matters, from falling into misery, and, *thro' the infinite mercy and goodness of their Maker*, to confer, perhaps, some inferiour degrees of happiness upon them—but we are to decide, whether reason, without any extraordinary assistance from heaven, can deduce a complete and perfect rule of religious faith and practice, and by that means be able, of itself, to exalt its votaries *to that highest degree of happiness*, which the God of nature made them capable of attaining. And this point, *say these devout enquirers*, we presume to think, has been clearly determined in the negative by the impartial view, which we have given of the general state of mora-

lity and religion amongst the wisest nations of the ancient world. And should any one still deny, or doubt, the truth of our conclusion, let him turn his eyes to the uninstructed tribes in the north of America, or the south of Africa, and then ingenuously answer himself, whether he thinks that these people are as completely happy at present, and have as good a prospect of continuing so in a future state, as if they were furnished with just and worthy apprehensions of the supreme Being and his superintending providence, and felt all that high and pleasing sensation, which is experienced to arise in the human breast, from the consciousness of acting agreeably to the extensive laws of moral rectitude, and of fully discharging their duty to their God, their fellow-creatures and themselves? He who thinks they are, if such a person there be, will find little difficulty to persuade himself farther, that there is no real difference between the human and the brute species, but in their several gradations of instinct; that all things are matter and motion, and governed by blind chance and undiscerning fate; and that happiness consists merely in freedom from pain, and in the indulgence of the sensual appetites.

As to the rest, *say these humble, reasonable and modest enquirers*, namely, why man was not originally created more perfect; why he was suffered to continue so many ages in ignorance of the means of being completely happy; and why so considerable a part of mankind are still permitted to lye in darkness and the shadow of death — these are arduous points which we confess ourselves utterly unable to solve, and therefore do we willingly leave them to the consummate wisdom of that almighty Being, who, we know, always does what is best for the good of the whole, whose mercy is over all his works, and in whose dispensations,

fations, with the most humble resignation, we dutifully acquiesce.

S E C T. XXXV.

General reflections upon the imperfection of ancient, and the perfection of modern, reason relatively to religious subjects. This difference not to be accounted for from the mere powers of the human mind, which have been always the same as they are now, and, in some nations, equally cultivated formerly, as at present.

THUS far these devout and unprejudiced searchers after truth—and most undeniable are the facts, as they have been here produced, at large, in their words and arguments. Eighteen hundred years are not fully elapsed, since the whole world, (the despised province of Judea, singly, excepted) were polytheists and idolaters; ignorant, in general, of the unity of God and his perfections; of the end of man and his chief good; of the spiritual worship due to the Deity, and of the true foundation of moral and religious obligation: nor were they more certain of the concern, which divine Providence took in the government of mankind; or of the existence of that future and spiritual state of rewards and punishments, which has such a mighty efficacy to give weight to religious instructions, and to assist reason in balancing the passions, and in discharge of duty.—And is it not amazing, that a system of moral principles and precepts; that a rule of religious faith and practice, which appears to us, at present, so convincingly to flow from our notions of God, and from the constitution and nature of things, should have been either wholly unknown to those nations, who had reason only for

their guide in these matters ; or, at best, believed by them and professed in so dark, perplexed and uninfluencing a manner, as to be, in many instances, prejudicial to the cause of virtue, rather than of any service to it ? *And how shall we attempt to give a satisfactory account of this surprising appearance in the rational world ; namely, of the clearness, precision and superiority of our knowledge, to that of all the ancient and modern heathens, upon the most important and interesting subjects, which can engage our attention and enquiry ?* Were, then, the powers of the human mind, in the earlier ages of the world, weaker and more imperfect than they are now experienced to be ? Certainly not. The faculty of reason in mankind was exactly the same formerly, as it is now ; and it is education only and better instruction, which distinguish the politer parts of the earth from the more uncivilized and barbarous nations. Mankind in all ages, and in all climates, as far as we have been able to carry our researches, seem to have been ever endued with the same share of natural sense, and to have been always capable of making the same advances in science with the same information and means of improvement. Wisdom and prudence and cunning are now what they formerly were ; nor can this age shew human nature in any one character exalted beyond the examples, which antiquity has left us. Can we produce greater instances of civil and political wisdom, than are to be found in the governments of Greece and Rome ? Are not the civil laws of Rome still had in admiration ? And have they not a place allowed them in almost all our western kingdoms ? But reason, perhaps, is more cultivated now, than it was eighteen hundred years ago, and moral subjects attended to and examined with greater assiduity and dili-

diligence !—Neither does this appear. On the contrary ; the various sects of philosophers both in the east and west, (amongst the Greeks especially) were continually meditating, discoursing and writing upon these interesting topicks, and their moral tracts, many of them, are extant even to this day—And what do they teach us, but to admire the strength of genius in their authors, to applaud their industry and application, and, at the same time, to pity their ignorance upon some of the most essential doctrines of religion, their frequent contradictions upon others, and their obscurity and want of authority upon all? What could have been performed by the mere strength of unassisted reason upon the great subject of morality, might have been justly expected from the continual meditations and labours of a Socrates, a Plato, an Aristotle, or a Tully : nor can we suppose, without being guilty of an absurd partiality, that the most profound, inquisitive and strongest thinkers amongst the moderns would have been able to have gone farther by their own strength, or have been more successful in their moral enquiries, and in extirpating idolatry, than the most curious, penetrating and studious spirits of antiquity.*

S E C T. XXXVI.

Our religious wisdom was communicated to us by God, thro' the intervention of Jesus Christ and his apostles.

FROM whence, then, had we our religious wisdom ; and to what new appearance in the intellectual world do we owe these superiour degrees

* *Bishop of London's Discourses*, vol. 1.

of light and knowledge, which so essentially distinguish the present delineations of the religion of nature from the best systems of morality framed either by the ancient philosophers, or by the most thoughtful and ingenious of the modern heathen nations?

The answer is as true, as it is obvious to every competent and impartial enquirer—We have advantages which they had not ; we received *our religious wisdom* by written tradition from the land of Judea ; it *was communicated unto us by God himself, in an extraordinary manner, through the intervention of Jesus Christ and his apostles.*

In the midst of those surounding clouds of ignorance, obscurity and confusion, which had overshadowed almost the whole ancient world, and which the utmost efforts of human reason had, in vain, endeavoured to dispel, a light sprang up at once, which has since diffused its brightness over a considerable part of the globe. That perfect scheme of religion and moral duty, which we now so much admire, and with so much confidence make our boast of, as if it had been the work of our own labour and penetration ; that additional and *authoritative* instruction, of which Socrates is reported so feelingly to have expressed his desire, and which was certainly wanting to teach mankind the best and surest way to obtain their greatest happiness, is found entire in the records of the New Testament. In those volumes, the whole religion of reason and nature, which, before their publication, had been either buried in ignorance, or obscured by inconsistent oral traditions, or overwhelmed under the affected jargon of conceited philosophers, is plainly discovered, laid open before us, and explained. In those books, life and immortality are taught with all the clearness, precision

cision and authority, which so leading and interesting a doctrine calls for. The solid sanctions of virtue and religion are there immoveably fixed; and the motives offered to encourage us to perform our whole duty, and to render ourselves worthy of those joys, which are to be found in the more immediate presence of God, are made as strong and forcible, as is compatible with the freedom of moral action: and there also are we shewed, to the inexpressible comfort and satisfaction of all good men, by what efficacious means God reconciles himself to sinners, blotting out the guilt of their past transgressions, and restoring them to his own favour, and to the certainty of a blessed eternity.

S E C T. XXXVII.

The apostles delivered to the world the doctrines and precepts of their master Jesus Christ — and Christ received his wisdom immediately from God. He could not have learned it from the Jews.

AND as we are not obliged either to the force of our own penetration, or to our progressive improvement upon what the great masters of human reason have left behind them, for the preeminence, which we so clearly enjoy over the whole heathen world in matters relating to the divine nature and religion, *but to the books of the New Testament*: so neither did the authors of these books owe the instructions, with which they have so greatly contributed to the information and improvement of mankind, to their own meditations and superiour skill in the art of reasoning, but they unanimously professed to speak the words of their master Jesus Christ, and of him only; they delivered his doctrines and precepts; in his
name

name their discourses were published, and by his commission and authority they undertook, what the wisdom of philosophy never so much as thought of undertaking, the arduous task of reforming a corrupted and idolatrous world, and of substituting a new and perfect religion in the place of popular error and superstition.

From whence then had Jesus Christ that extraordinary wisdom, which is so eminently displayed in the writings of his apostles? He himself expressly tells us, that he came into the world in the name of God, being sent by him to do and declare his will; that he did nothing of himself; and that all things, which he said and did, he received from him, who sent him. And it is, I think, impossible not to give the most unreserved credit to what he thus relates to us with respect to this important point. For from what other fountain could such wonderful knowledge have been originally derived? He must have received his information either from the learned labours and institutions of his own countrymen; or from the instructions and writings of foreign nations; or, it must have been, as he explicitly and uniformly assures us it was, supernatural, and communicated to him immediately from the Father of light and truth. For we cannot be so extravagantly absurd as to maintain, that he was self-taught; that he owed his wisdom to his own reflections and meditations entirely; and that uninformed and uninstructed merely-human-reason was by its own strength, and without any external assistance whatever, able to go beyond the united penetration both of the eastern and western world.

Did he, then, receive his superiour wisdom upon the subject of religion, his doctrines and his precepts, from the institutions and writings of his own countrymen? from the commentaries of the rabbins, the allegories of philosophers, the

the abstractions of the Essenes, and the speculations of the doctors of the law? A moments attention will convince every competent judge, that this supposition is highly improbable and unsatisfactory. For it is, I think, confessed on all hands, that the Jews, in the days of Jesus, were a remarkably ignorant people in matters of invention, literature and science—slaves to the several sects and parties, into which they were divided, enemies to all ingenuous liberty of thinking, bigots to their own opinions, and steddily persisting in the singular customs of their forefathers, which they fondly imagined were never to be abolished, they despised, and, in their turn, were equally contemned by all the rest of the world. Their religion, indeed, such as it had been originally transmitted to them in their sacred books, had taught them the unreasonableness of idolatry, and fully instructed them in the belief of the one true God: nor were the more considerable branches of the moral duties unknown to the law and the prophets, though these duties, at the time we are speaking of, were become a dead letter, and rendered of little effect, by that heap of vain and useless oral traditions, which their prevailing sect had profanely introduced in their stead. And surely Jesus Christ, the son of an untaught mechanick, engaged himself in one of the lowest professions of life, without education and without the knowledge even of letters, was not a man to have been able, by the mere force of his own understanding, to have separated the original truth from traditional corruptions, to have unveiled the latent meaning of the jewish scriptures, and to have restored religion to its native simplicity, *had he not been favoured, as he expressly tells us he was, by the extraordinary assistance of heaven.*

S E C T. XXXVIII.

The wisdom of Christ was not borrowed from the meditations of the eastern philosophers, nor from the writings of Greece and Rome.

BUT might not Christ's wisdom have been transmitted to him from foreign countries? Might not the contemplative Magi, Bramins, or Gnosticks; might not the famous philosophers of Greece and Rome have been his guides and instructors in divine matters? Might he not have improved his notions from hints, which had been originally conveyed to him in their works? The shortest examination will evince, that this hypothesis is even more inconclusive, than that which we have been considering and refuting. For (to say nothing of the little correspondence, either literary or religious, which was, at this time, carried on between the Jewish nation and the rest of the world) can it, with the least appearance of probability, be imagined, that Jesus Christ, the son of a poor illiterate mechanick, uneducated, without so much as the knowledge of the first elements of literature, should be able to deduce his wisdom from authorities so profound and abstruse? Read with attention the writings of the most celebrated authors of the ages preceding Christ, either the fragments of the oriental sages, or the more labour'd volumes of western learning, and you will want no other arguments to convince you, that the pure and unmixed streams, which run through the doctrines and precepts of the books of the New Testament, could not possibly have been derived from fountains so turbid and corrupt. Could, for example, the unaffected simplicity of that spiritual worship,

worship, which is contained in the records of the gospel, have been borrowed from the mysterious obscurity of the Egyptian wisdom, or collected from the extravagant reveries, and whimsical superstitions of the Magi, Gymnosophists and Gnosticks? Or could the unity of God, his incommunicable and spiritual nature, be learned from the writings of an Aristotle, a Varro, or a Tully, all of them gross idolaters in their own practice, and encouragers of the same impiety in the books, which they made publick for the information of mankind? The precepts of Christ are undeniably more perfective of the human nature; his promises more certain and explicit; his rewards more desirable; and his institutions, in every respect, more pious useful and beneficial to mankind, than either the hypocritical austerities of the pharisees, or the gloomy rites and abstractions of the orientalists, or the most admired laws of the most admired lawgivers of Greece or Rome. Let us take Confucius, Zoroaster, Socrates, Plato, or the greatest moralist that ever lived without the light of the gospel, and it will appear, that their best systems of moral instruction were intermixed and blended with so much superstition, and so many gross absurdities, as quite eluded and defeated the main design of them. *In Christ's discourses* no views of self-interest appear, no schemes of popular ambition are carried on, nor any particular vice indulged under the specious pretence of the publick good; but all is uniformly and consistently pure and holy, grave and serious, solemn and devout, without the least tincture of superstition, vanity or ostentation; all is plain, simple, and obvious to the poor as well as the rich, to the vulgar as well as the philosopher——*From whence then had this man this wisdom?* A question of this leading importance can scarcely be too often proposed,

proposed, or too maturely considered and examined. Human wisdom, we know by experience, is not to be acquired, but by diligently applying the heart to search, and to seek it out; but by much labour and industry, by long study and an unwearied attention of the mind to the subject of our enquiry. For we can no more be wise and learned, than we can be virtuous, by instinct. But Christ was utterly destitute of all such sort of assistances, of all the common and ordinary methods of improvement. This is universally confessed; he was reproached for it by the taunting and offended Galileans, who were best acquainted with him, and perfectly well knew his manner of life from his youth upwards. His fellow-citizens and neighbours frequently upbraided him, that he had had no education; that he had never applied himself to reading, that he had not been initiated even into the first elements of literature — Nevertheless both his own countrymen and foreigners; both friends and enemies; both learned and unlearned, all stand astonished at the excellent spirit, with which he was endued, and which has in fact worked such a wonderful revolution in the moral and religious world since his time. Can we then make a thoughtful and serious doubt, can we really be at a loss to know, from whence he had that wisdom, which he communicated to his disciples in so ample a manner, and which from them has been transmitted to us? *It must have been extraordinary and supernatural; it must have originally descended from heaven; it must have been derived to him, immediately, from the everlasting fountain of knowledge wisdom and truth.*

S E C T. XXXIX.

If Jesus Christ was sent by God to reveal his will to mankind, this is a fact, and must be proved, as all other historical facts are, by external evidence.

BUT a point of this fundamental importance to the interest of true religion must not be lightly passed over; and an event, so much out of the common and usual course of divine Providence, as this is supposed to be, calls for the most wary, cautious and accurate examination, before it be either hastily admitted, or rashly rejected. If God almighty really has made known his will to mankind by an express revelation communicated to Christ and his apostles, as they pretend, and as we cannot but think extremely probable from what has been already observed—This is a matter of fact, and, notwithstanding all the presumptive evidence which may be offered in its favour, must be proved, as all other facts, before they are admitted to be true, are proved, by its own genuine and proper evidence. As reasonable creatures, having received all things from God, and hoping all things from his power, justice, and goodness, we profess ourselves ready to follow the unerring guidance of the divine will, through whatever difficulties and discouragements it may lead our careful steps. Only we would be fully convinced, that the star, which we are to pursue as our conductor, be really of heavenly origin, and not one of those blazing meteors, those earth-born flames, which, after hurrying the astonished traveller over bogs and precipices, leaves him, at last, farther from his destined home, than when he first set out upon his journey.

S E C T. XL.

God can reveal his will to mankind, if he pleases, and the person to whom such revelation is made, may be infallibly assured, that it is God who speaks to him.

THUS, then, may we safely argue upon this important subject without fear of being misled either by the warmth of our own imaginations, or the delusions of crafty impostors, or the credulity of self-deceived enthusiasts. Should God almighty, either out of his abundant goodness to his reasonable creatures, or to answer some other wise purpose of his sovereign administration, vouchsafe at any time to make a larger and more express discovery of his will to them, than they have, in fact, collected for themselves from the system of nature and general constitution of things; such new discovery must be made either immediately to every individual of every age and nation, of whom it shall be required to pay a regard to this will: or it must be made to some particular person or persons, with commission to them, that they afterwards communicate it to all such persons, as may be any ways concerned to know and obey it. That the first of these methods has not been taken; and that God almighty has not thought fit to interrupt the ordinary course of his Providence by making a particular discovery of his will to every individual, we can want no other argument to convince us, than our own proper experience. If then such revelation has been, in fact, ever given to mankind, it must have been by the second of these methods; namely, *by divine communications made to some particular person or persons.* Now that the author of nature can,

can, in the extraordinary manner here supposed, if he should so please, communicate his will to his rational creatures, cannot seriously be doubted, there being nothing in such a supposition repugnant either to the attributes of the divine Being on the one hand, or to the nature of man on the other. For if it be in the human power distinctly to convey our sentiments and notions to each other; and, in our mutual wants, to comfort and assist each other with information, advice and instruction, shall not that Being, who is every where present, who knows whereof the understanding is made, and is intimately acquainted with the best means of exciting and impressing ideas and notions upon our soul, be able to do the same? Shall not he be able, if it be agreeable to the gracious purposes of his wise administration, to give to his creatures a particular information either of such truths, as they could not have discovered by means of their natural faculties; or of such truths, as they could, perhaps, have discovered, tho' not without much labour; or which, in fact, he might foreknow they never would have discovered, if left entirely to their own strength?

But if it be not a thing impossible in itself, as evidently it is not, for God almighty to reveal his will to his rational creatures; then nothing can be more certain, than that the persons, who shall be favoured with these divine communications, may be assured by the strongest and most irresistible evidence, that it is God himself, whom they feel speaking to them, and that they are not misled by the mere force of their persuasion, and the ardour of an over-lively fancy. For unless the persons, to whom such revelations may chance to be made, are able clearly to distinguish the divine impressions from all natural motions and operations whatever, and can be convinced of this essential circumstance

without a possibility of mistake, the divine interposition will be entirely useless and vain; and as well might no revelation at all have been made to them—nor will they ever be able to satisfy either themselves or others in a rational manner, that they have not mistaken the groundless workings of their own over-heated imaginations for celestial influence and inspiration.

S E C T. XLI.

Persons, claiming to be inspired, and to act under a divine commission, are not to be believed upon their own authority, but upon the strongest evidence which the nature of the case will admit.

Without perplexing ourselves, therefore, with nicely-intricate questions concerning the specifick nature and various degrees of inspiration; or about the manner, in which the divine Power operates upon the human mind; or whether a man ought to be looked upon as a free agent, whilst he is under the influence of the heavenly communication—thus far do we own ourselves to be fully convinced, and to these propositions, as to so many undoubted truths, are we resolved to adhere in all their consequences, namely, that God almighty can reveal his will to mankind, in an extraordinary manner, by the instrumentality of one or more persons, should he, at any time, think proper to do so—that the persons favoured with these revelations may be assured, beyond a possibility of doubt, that they are derived to them from the Father of light and truth—and, that these revelations may be so deeply inscribed upon the memories of the persons, to whom they shall have been made, that they shall not be able either to forget or mistake them, should they

they be commissioned to communicate to other people what has been thus discovered to them. The point, therefore, which claims the next place in our maturest consideration and discussion, is, by what arguments other persons (those, I mean, to whom the revelation may afterwards be related in order to influence their religious conduct) may be convinced beyond the power of rational doubt, that he, who speaks to them, is really an inspired teacher sent from God. The great point, I say, which we are now concerned most carefully to enquire into is, *what evidence we have a right to call for and to expect, before we give our full assent and obedience to what shall be delivered to us, under the high character of coming immediately from heaven.* In a case of this very interesting and very extraordinary nature, we ought not to acquiesce in any evidence, which is not the strongest and most decisive, which the question in debate will admit. And unless we act in this reserved, prudent and cautious manner; unless we apply the infallible touchstone of reason and argument, before we acknowledge the pretensions of the person claiming to be inspired, and resign our understanding to his doctrines, we shall never be able clearly to determine, whether our instructor himself (hurried away by the warmth of his imagination, and not knowing how to distinguish between realities and appearances) may not have been deceived; or whether, conscious of the imposture, he may not have put on the mask of sanctity, and abused the name of God, the more securely to carry on a scheme of knavery, and to prey upon the credulity of his fellow-creatures.

S E C T. XLII.

Strength of persuasion in the prophet himself is not sufficient evidence of his inspiration to other persons; nor the holyness of his life; nor the reasonableness of his doctrine; nor arguments in proof of the necessity and usefulness of a divine revelation. No evidence to be admitted in this case, but the unfallible testimony of God himself.

FOR these reasons, whoever cometh to us in the name of the most high God, pretending to have received an extraordinary commission from him, (whether it be to publish doctrines entirely new, or to explain any former revelation, or, in general, to reform the religious principles and notions of the world,) we have an unquestionable right to call for the *proper credentials*; to examine them with the utmost rigour and exactness, and to be absolutely satisfied of their force and authenticity, before we surrender our faith to what he advances. Is, then, *the mere strength of persuasion in the prophet himself* the credentials, which we are enquiring after, and evidence sufficient to direct us in a matter, wherein our greatest happiness is so nearly concerned? If so, by what rule shall we be able effectually to distinguish between the reveries of fanatics, and the genuine revelations of heaven; between the salutary suggestions of the Father of light and truth, and the zealous fervors of a heart over-charged with devotion? If confidence of assertion might be allowed as a satisfactory argument, that a doctrine comes immediately from God, the most contradictory propositions would have an equal title to pass for celestial illuminations, and to be revered as of divine authority. For there is scarcely an
opinion

opinion so absurd, or practice so unreasonable and extravagant, which some one or other has not pretended, with all the vehemence of the most ardent enthusiasm, to sanctify by a particular warrant from heaven. *Shall then the holyness, austerity, innocence and rigid regularity of the life of our instructor be urged as an incontestible proof, that the divine Spirit, in a peculiar manner, breathes within him?* But this evidence, cogent as it may appear to be at first view, will be found altogether deceitful, when tried in the accurate balance of reason, and not worthy the value, which has been too often put upon it. For as there is no necessary connection between the behaviour of a free agent, and the principles which he really maintains, and doctrines which he believes, our teacher, notwithstanding appearances, may possibly be an hypocrite; at least, we cannot be certain that he is not, unless we had the knowledge of that Being, from whom alone no secrets are hid. Pride, vanity, self-interest and a fondness for being known, talked of and distinguished from the herd of mankind, may be the real deities, whom he serves and adores, and from whom all his boasted inspiration is derived. At best, a man may be very good, and lead a righteous sober and religious life, and yet be no prophet, nor have any right, as such, to make innovations in the established faith and practice of the rest of the world. Nor will the newness of any doctrine, its excellency, reasonableness and consistency be ever regarded by those, who understand the power and propriety of evidence, as the true and decisive proof, that what is taught was discovered to the author, or propagator of it, by an immediate revelation from heaven. For much study, contemplation, diligence in enquiry, a peculiar felicity of genius, and even hazard may sometimes

throw a man upon certain truths both in the natural and moral world, which were before thought to have been beyond the reach of the human faculties. As little will deep and curious metaphysical dissertations upon the divine nature and attributes, to prove that it is suitable to the wisdom and goodness of the Creator of the universe to make known his whole will to mankind by an express revelation; or merely moral arguments to shew the usefulness and expediency of such a revelation; or dubious conjectures upon the necessity of it, relatively to ourselves, be submitted to as clear and decisive proofs, that God has really, in this manner, ever discovered his will to mankind: unless in support and confirmation of such reasoning *a priori* (which should never be applied to contingent events, but with the utmost caution) there be super-added the only adequate, sufficient and uncontrovertible evidence, which can be offered in a case so extraordinary, as this before us, even *the infallible testimony of God himself*. For as the primitive religion of mankind was founded in the original system and constitution of things; no addition, diminution nor alteration ought to be made in it, but by the same divine authority, which established the laws of nature, and commanded mankind to collect from *them* their duty and moral obligation.

S E C T. XLIII.

God can give this infallible testimony by enabling the prophet to work miracles in his name; that is, by enabling him to controul the established laws of nature and providence. Faith, in consequence of miracles, is divine faith. It is faith in God, and not in the prophet.

THAT all things are possible to the Author and Lord of the universe, which imply not self-contradiction, we know for certain from the contemplation of his attributes; nor are we less assured, that as he made and constituted the order of nature, so he can, at any time, change, alter or suspend it, if ever the important purposes of his moral government should require him to do so. As therefore, it has not pleased him to reveal his will immediately to ourselves; if we are to believe that he has had this condescension for other persons, and are really interested in the subject of the divine revelation, we may hope, from that essential rectitude which governs all his actions, that he will give to us the highest possible evidence that he has done so; we may reasonably expect, that he will enable the person, who addresses us in his words, to shew some effectual sign of his inspiration, to perform *some extraordinary work*, (or *miracle*, as it is usually called) *something above and beyond the usual and known power of second causes to produce*. For this is a testimony, which is not equivocal; it is a language, which cannot be misunderstood; it is a language, which no being, but God himself, can be supposed to speak. Let therefore the prophet, who comes to us in the name of the Lord, do some great thing before us; something, which

which the utmost efforts of human wisdom, power or artifice cannot be conceived capable of doing ; let the divine Spirit bear witness to the high authority which he claims, by enabling him, upon so important an occasion, to controul the established laws and order of Providence—and, behold ! all our prejudices are vanished at once, as mists before the rising sun ! our natural incredulity is removed ; our attention is wholly fixed upon what he is about to deliver, and we are prepared to believe with the most profound reverence, and with the most entire submission to obey, the infallible message which he brings. Doctrines thus circumstanced and supported are *Gods doctrines* ; words thus confirmed are the words of truth ; and *faith thus founded is divine, and not human faith*. We believe the sacred messenger not for his own sake, and upon the strength of his own evidence, but upon the authority of that omnipotent Being, who, by permitting, consenting, or commanding him to work such wondrous works, not only bears testimony to his veracity, but, at the same time, gives a sanction likewise to the weight and importance of his message.

S E C T. XLIV.

Our conviction and faith will be equally rational, whether we see miracles performed ourselves, or are certain that they have been performed by the testimony of other persons, eye-witnesses. Human testimony a proper medium of belief and practice.

THUS, then, may the contemporaries of the inspired person be convinced of his divine mission beyond a possibility of rational doubt ; those of them, I mean, who have the evidence of his mighty

mighty works before their own eyes in proof of the truth of his doctrines, and of the supernatural power which animates and directs his words and actions. But what shall the rest of his countrymen do in this case, and how shall more distant nations conduct themselves, who may, perhaps, be equally interested in the matter of the inspiration, and yet have no opportunity either of conversing with the prophet himself, or of beholding his miracles? *Is there no way of satisfying them, likewise, of the divine authority of the teacher; of removing their scruples upon this most interesting point, and of fixing their faith upon a reasonable foundation?* Certainly there is. For if the prophet has really worked miracles in the sight of many people (as he is here supposed to have done) this is a matter of fact, and, consequently, capable of being proved, as all other matters of fact are, by the evidence of such persons, as were eye-witnesses of them. For, whether we see the miracles performed with our own eyes, or are fully convinced that they were performed by the concurrent and uncontradicted testimony of a sufficient number of other people, whom either curiosity or other motives had disposed to see and enquire into them, the conclusions from such conviction will be exactly the same in both cases; namely, that they were worked with the approbation and permission of God for some important purposes of his moral government; that the person or persons impowered to perform them were divinely authorised to do so; and that the doctrines delivered by them in the name of the Most High, and confirmed, as above, under the seal of heaven, have a rightful claim to be acknowledged, believed and obeyed as coming directly from him. The single point, therefore, which we want to be entirely satisfied in, is, *that the miracles have been actually*

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ally performed—And can we not have such entire satisfaction, unless we behold the prophet with our own eyes; unless we ourselves see him controuling the established laws of nature, and interrupting the regular course of Providence? Undoubtedly we may. For human testimony, by the acknowledgement of all mankind, may be so circumstanced, as to produce infallible assurance, or an evidence so strong, as none but a fool or madman would doubt of it; and this *assent to testimony, or the experience of other persons, hath its foundation in the nature of things; in the constitution of the world and mankind.* Philosophers, indeed, and persons of much abstraction may call in question the reports of their own senses, and, from an affectation of deeper thought and a more profound penetration than the rest of their fellow-creatures, may pretend to deny, that we can be sure of the existence of any thing in the world, but of ourselves, or, at best, of any thing but what falls immediately within our own experience. But their refined and subtle speculations will have very little effect upon the serious, unprejudiced and practical part of mankind, who will no more doubt of the reality of a fact, which is invariably attested to them by a proper number of honest and competent *eye-witnesses*, whose evidence stands uncontradicted, than if it had fallen under the immediate cognizance of their own senses. To argue, therefore, against well-supported authority, or external evidence in general, as a proper medium of faith and practice, is to endeavour to destroy one of the best informers of the human reason. The most extensive knowledge of the wisest man is confined within a very narrow compass, and would be still more limited and restrained, were he left entirely to his own experience, and to the deductions of his own understanding. We see
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frequently with other peoples eyes, we hear with their ears, and trust the report of their senses, almost as much as we do our own, and act agreeably thereto; and it is highly reasonable to do so, or, in many cases, we should not be able to act at all—The utmost that common sense requires is, that every thing proposed to the understanding for its assent should be accompanied with the best proofs, which the nature and circumstances of the case will admit of. He who requires more is guilty of absurdity, and he who demands less of rashness.

S E C T. XLV.

Miraculous facts are capable of being proved by testimony, tho' such facts have never fallen under our own inspection and experience. As there may be probability without truth, so there may be truth without probability.

BUT here, perhaps, it may be suggested, that miracles are facts of such a nature, as, *having never fallen under our own inspection and experience*, are, for that reason, *incapable of being proved*; and therefore not to be credited, even though they should be affirmed by the most seemingly-full, strong and unexceptionable evidence, which can be offered by other people. Are we then to believe nothing, with regard to past facts, but what we perceive to be exactly conformable to our own previous observation and experience, and where the connection between cause and effect has been formerly discerned by our own senses? But should this be admitted, as the only true and proper standard or criterion of credibility, it will be so far from being a *certain guide* to direct the measure of human faith, that it will be ever varying, as the
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experience of those varies, to whose belief the events are proposed. For all persons have not equal opportunities of observing and examining the same things, and an event may be familiar to some men, which was never heard of by others. Upon this general principle, that nothing, which is contradictory to our own uniform and unalterable experience, can be the object of our belief, even events plainly deducible from the laws of nature, and which are to be accounted for upon mechanical principles, will be excluded from being credible, as well as miracles; nor can any evidence be sufficient to convince the inhabitants of the torrid zone, (however certain the fact is in itself, and however well attested it may be to them) that water, in certain parts of the world, frequently becomes as hard and solid as the earth itself, and as capable of bearing armies upon it*. In all cases, indeed, of an unusual and extraordinary nature; in all cases especially wherein our greatest happiness may be intimately concerned, we have a right to call for *an extraordinary degree of testimony*; such a degree of testimony, as is fully proportionate to the natural incredibility of the event to be attested; and if that be granted to us, to refuse our assent to the existence of the fact, which it is urged to support, merely because it is not agreeable to our own experience, is as unreasonable and unjustifiable, as it is plainly repugnant to the sentiments and practice of the world. To say that we will not believe even a whole host of witnesses, except we know before-hand by other arguments, that what they tell us is actually true, or highly probable at least, is fundamentally to destroy all use of human testimony; it is to put a con-

* See *Criterion*. By the Revd. Dr. Douglass.

straint upon our nature, and to reject the dictates even of common sense. For whose experience is so small, as not to have taught him, that *as there is sometimes probability without truth; so there is frequently truth when there is no probability?* If it implies no contradiction, that the course of nature may change; if miracles are in themselves possible, as undoubtedly they are to that almighty Being, to whose agency alone we impute them; if, when performing, they are as much the object of our senses, as any other events can be supposed to be—if, for instance, I can be as certain of the fact, should I at any time see an acute fever removed, *at once*, upon the mere speaking of a word, as I may be certain, if I perceive it yielding, *by slow degrees*, to the salutary prescriptions of the physician—may I not relate what I have thus seen to other people? And what sufficient reason can be given, from the nature of the fact itself I mean, why they should not believe my testimony in this case, as well as in such others, as may have more conformity to their proper experience? *If miracles may be the objects of sight and evidence, as well as other more usual facts, no sufficient reason can be assigned, why they should not be equally the objects of credibility.* It is not necessary, therefore, that every individual, who is contemporary with the prophet, and supposed to be interested in the matter of a divine revelation, should have ocular evidence in proof of the prophets divine inspiration; because they may be satisfactorily convinced of the truth of this essential point by the united testimony of a sufficient number of living witnesses, into whose competency for judgement, veracity and sincerity they have abundant opportunity to make the proper enquiry.

S E C T. XLVI.

Persons, removed from the times wherein the prophet lived, are to proceed with the utmost diligence and caution in examining into the certainty of such miraculous facts as are proposed for their belief.

BUT if the revelation given to the prophet be intended to affect future ages, as well as that wherein it is first delivered ; if it be proposed as the object of *universal belief*, and be designed to influence the religious practice of all nations, to whom it shall be duly made known and published—how shall distant generations, how shall such persons, for instance, as are far removed from the times, wherein the prophet lived, be thoroughly satisfied of the fundamental points above-mentioned ; namely, that he was no impostor, that he actually worked miracles in proof of the divine authority speaking in him, and, consequently, that the doctrines and precepts, thus recommended to the general acceptance, were really discovered to him by the immediate inspiration of heaven ? *They are, certainly, to proceed with the utmost diligence, caution and sincerity in making the important enquiry ; they are to divest themselves, as much as possible, of all prejudices and preconceived opinions, before they enter upon the necessary examination ; they are to believe nothing, unless it be founded upon sufficient argument, nor are they to deny their assent to any thing, which is supported by all the proof, which the nature of the thing in question will admit of. For God is not a hard master ; nor will he require us to embrace any system of notions as coming from him, unless there be abundant testimony to convince our understanding, that they really do so.*

S E C T.

S E C T. XLVII.

Facts of the miraculous kind may become the objects of a rational credibility, even many ages after they have been performed.

NOW that past facts, in general, may be handed down to the latest posterity with such circumstances, and in such a manner, as to become the objects of a rational credibility, cannot be seriously doubted by any thinking person, who is acquainted with the dispositions of the human nature, and with the commanding power of evidence upon our minds. Are we not, for example, as certain, that there formerly existed such persons as Alexander the Great and Julius Cæsar, and that the one conquered the kingdom of Persia, and the other triumphed over the liberties of his country, as we are assured, that queen Elizabeth, some time since, reigned in this island, or, indeed, that George the second is at present sovereign of Great Britain? Whatever nice differences between the various degrees of certitude the subtle disputant may imagine that he can discover by the help of his metaphysical compasses; with regard to all the moral and civil purposes of life, we can, in reality, no more doubt of the former of these facts, than we do of the latter. Nor will it be sufficient to prove the history of past events uncertain, and not to be depended upon in cases of importance, to assert, that they come to us through the channel of human testimony and tradition, that is, *through the evidence of men, who are by nature both fallible and peccable.* For human tradition and testimony may be attended with such circumstances as to yield full assurance to

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any reasonable person, not only of the existence of such past events, as may be conformable to his own experience, but even of those miraculous facts, which are contrary to the usual course and operations of nature. And therefore he who shall doubt of the existence of *such extraordinary facts*, and reject them, (for into the credibility of these only are we at present enquiring) without being able to assign any other reason for his doubting and rejecting them, than because they are delivered down to him by human testimony and tradition, would deservedly render himself ridiculous in the opinion of every candid and competent judge. Let us then enquire, with all the candour and attention which so interesting a subject calls for, what is the solid ground of the minds assent in these cases; and what are the leading circumstances, which will vindicate a reasonable man for giving credit to facts, *even of a miraculous kind*, said to be done many ages past; for arguing from them, as from undoubted truths; and, as it may happen, for regulating his moral and religious conduct by conclusions drawn from them. A wise man never quits sight of reason, nor ever follows its auspicious influence to more effectual purpose, than when he exactly proportions his assent and practice to the several degrees of evidence, as they appear to his well-informed judgment.

S E C T. XLVIII.

An enumeration of the various circumstances which render miraculous facts credible to posterity.

IF then the miraculous facts, which are proposed for our belief, and upon the credit of which

which the divine authority of a particular system of doctrines and precepts depends, are such, 1. as do not imply a self-contradiction in them: 2. If they appear to have been done publicly, in the view of a great multitude of people, and with a professed intention to establish the divine authority of the person or persons who did them: 3. If they were many in number, frequently repeated, and continued for a series of years together: 4. If they were of an interesting nature in themselves, likely to have made strong impressions upon the minds of all who saw, and heard of them, and, for that reason probably, much attended to, talked of and examined into at the time of their performance: 5. If the effects produced by them were not transient, but lasting; such as must have existed for many years, and were capable, all the while, of being disproved if they were not real: 6. If they were committed to writing at, or very near, the time, when they are said to have been done, and by persons of undoubted integrity, who tell us that they had been eye-witnesses of the events which they relate; by persons, who having sufficient opportunity of knowing the whole truth of what they bear testimony to, could not possibly be deceived themselves; and who, having no conceivable motive nor temptation to falsify their evidence, cannot, with the least shadow of probability, be suspected of intending to deceive other people: 7. If there be no proof, nor well-grounded suspicion of proof, that the testimony of those, who bear witness to these extraordinary facts, was ever contradicted even by such as professed themselves open enemies to their persons, characters and views, though the facts were first published upon the spot, where they are said to have been originally

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ginally performed, and amongst persons, who were engaged by private interest, and furnished with full authority, inclination and opportunity, to have manifested the falsity of them, and to have detected the imposture, had they been able: 8. If,

on the contrary, the existence of these facts be expressly allowed by the persons, who thought themselves most concerned to prevent the genuine consequences, which might be deduced from them; and there were, originally, no other disputes about them, but *to what sufficient cause* they were to be imputed. 9. If, again, the witnesses, from whom we have these facts, were many in number, all of them unanimous in the substance of their evidence, and all, as may be collected from their whole conduct, men of such unquestionable good sense, as secured them against all delusion in themselves, and of such undoubted integrity and unimpeached veracity, as placed them beyond all suspicion of any design to put an imposture upon others—if they were men, who shewed the sincerity of their own conviction by acting under the uniform influence of the extraordinary works, which they bore witness to, in express contradiction to all their former prejudices and most favoured notions; in express contradiction to every flattering prospect of worldly honour, profit and advantage either for themselves or for their friends; and when they could not but be previously assured, that ignominy, persecution, misery and even death itself, most probably, would attend the constant and invariable perseverance in their testimony: 10. If these witnesses, in order that their evidence might have the greater weight with a doubting world, (each nation being already in possession of an established religion) were themselves enabled to perform such extraordinary

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traordinary works, as testified the clear and indisputable interposition of a divine power in favour of their veracity; and, after having undergone the severest afflictions, vexations and torments, at length laid down their lives, in confirmation of the truth of the facts asserted by them:

11. If great multitudes of the contemporaries of these witnesses, men of almost all nations, tempers and professions, were persuaded by them, that these facts were really performed in the manner related, and gave the strongest testimony, which it was in their power to give, of the firmness of their belief of them, both by immediately breaking through all their ancient attachments and connections of friendship, interest, country, and even of religion, and by acting in express contradiction to them:

12. If the revolutions introduced in the moral and religious world, since the period wherein these facts are said to have happened, have been just such as they would, probably, have been, upon a supposition of the truth of them, and cannot possibly be accounted for from any other adequate cause:

13. And, lastly, if we have all the proof, which the exactest rules of the severest criticism can require, to evince, that no alterations have been made in the original records and writings left us by these witnesses in any material article of their evidence, since their first publication, either through accident or design; but that they have been transmitted to us in all their genuine purity, as they were left by their authors.——

In such a situation of things, where so great a variety of circumstances, where indeed all imaginable circumstances mutually concur to confirm, strengthen and support each others evidence, and concenter, as it were, in attestation of the same interesting series of events, with-

out a single argument on the other side, but the mere extraordinaryness of the facts—shall we not be justly accused of indulging an unreasonable incredulity in denying our assent to them? And will not such incredulity be as dangerous, as it is ridiculous? If facts attested in so clear, decisive and unexceptionable a manner, and delivered down to posterity with so many conspiring signs and monuments of truth, are, nevertheless, not to be believed; it is, I think, impossible for the united wisdom of mankind to point out any evidence of historical events, which will justify a wise and cautious man for giving credit to them—and; consequently, with regard to past ages, all will be clouds and thick darkness to us; all will be hesitation and scepticism; nor will any thing be credible, which comes not confirmed to us by the report of our own senses and experience. In short, where there is the strongest assurance of the existence of any particular series of past facts, which we are capable of acquiring, according to the present frame of our nature, and the state of things in the world, to reject these facts after all, and to pretend to excuse ourselves from not believing them, upon the bare suspicion of a possibility that they may be false, is a most absurd contradiction to the principles of common sense, and to the universal practice of mankind.

S E C T. XLIX.

Miraculous facts may be conveyed to future ages with such a degree of certainty, as shall be sufficient to render our belief of them rational, and, consequently, to influence our religious conduct. It is of the essence of miracles not to be frequent.

WE cannot, indeed, in the nature of the thing itself, be made quite so certain, that God almighty has discovered his will, in an extraordinary manner, to any other person, as we should be, had such a revelation been immediately impressed upon our own minds: nor can we, at present, have the same high degree of demonstration of the existence of miracles formerly done, as if we had either seen them performed with our own eyes, or had been contemporaries of the persons, who were witnesses to the working of them.

But then the question is not concerning the various degrees of certainty, which the human mind is capable of discerning, and which in moral matters frequently requires much nicety to be accurately measured, and precisely determined; but whether past facts, even those which are of a miraculous kind, may not, in general, be conveyed to us with such a degree of conviction, as shall render the belief of them reasonable: whether they may not be attended with such a strong degree of evidence and assurance, as may be sufficient, if occasion requires, to inform and direct our religious conduct, and to remove all our real scruples and doubtfulness concerning them. Should it, however, be still urged, that the extraordinary facts, said to have been formerly done in attestation of a particular revelation of the di-

vine will, should be performed over again for the satisfaction of every individual in every age and nation, whom such revelation may concern, a very little attention will be sufficient to convince us, that such a demand is as absurd in itself, as it has been shewed to be entirely unnecessary. For, miracles being changes made in the established laws of nature, nothing can be clearer, than that it *must be of the essence of this kind of evidence not to be frequent*. For as we know nothing of the laws or course of nature, but from long observation and experience, from seeing the constant, regular and uniform determinations of bodies, the powers of certain causes to produce certain effects, and the inability of those causes to produce certain other effects—if interruptions of these laws were common, we should never be able to tell, which were laws of nature, and which not; and, consequently, could never venture to pronounce with certainty, that these interruptions were real miracles. *

S E C T. L.

It is proposed to examine the truth of the Christian religion by the principles before laid down. The divine original of the Mosaic revelation will be proved by proving the divine original of Christianity.

HAVING laid down these general principles, which, it is humbly presumed, will appear clear, reasonable and uncontrovertible to every serious enquirer after truth, we will now bring the interesting subject home to ourselves; we will go on to examine, with the same sincerity, can-

* See an *Enquiry into the evidences of religion*, by Mrs. Newcome.

dour and diligence which have hitherto guided our researches—*whether the almighty Being, who governs all things by his wise and good Providence, has, in fact, ever discovered his will to mankind in an extraordinary manner*; and, in particular, we will take a full and impartial review of the proofs, which may be urged in attestation of the divine original of the Christian religion, as this religion appears to stand fairest, in the universal opinion, to be the genuine offspring of an immediate revelation from heaven. For though divines and law-givers, convinced of the great advantages which would result to their several societies, if their doctrines and institutions were believed to be of celestial birth, have, in almost all ages and countries of the world, laid in their claim to the high privilege of having been inspired by their favourite deities: yet have their pretensions been generally exploded, as so many pious fictions without basis or support, as soon as they have been tried by the infallible touchstone of evidence. Let it, however, be observed, that I do not here omit the examination of the arguments, which are usually produced in favour of *the divine authority of the Mosaic dispensation*, because I am not entirely persuaded of their sufficiency; but because a thorough and effectual demonstration of the celestial origin of the gospel will, at the same time, prove, vindicate and establish both the authenticity and divine authority of the Jewish scriptures, these scriptures being continually acknowledged, and every where appealed to in the records of Christianity as genuine, true, and derived immediately from heaven through the ministration of Moses and the prophets. The connection between the New and Old Testament is indissoluble; they cannot

cannot be separated from each other without their mutual destruction.

S E C T. LI.

The nature of Christs commission according to his own claim. The manner of his executing this commission.

THUS then must the interesting question, concerning the divine original of the Christian religion, appear to every attentive and competent reader, who takes the New Testament into his hands, with an inflexible resolution to think seriously for himself, and to reason impartially upon what he finds written in those volumes. Behold Christ Jesus claiming to be divinely inspired; claiming to be the blessing of all nations and to be *that Prophet*, whose coming had been so long since, and so frequently foretold in the Jewish scriptures; claiming to be sent from heaven in an extraordinary manner, and to have received a commission immediately from the almighty God himself to speak to the world in his name, and in his name, and by his authority, to instruct mankind in every thing, which they were to believe and to do in order to obtain everlasting life. And, accordingly, we see him going up and down in the several parts of the land of Judea, and addressing his affecting discourses to the astonished multitude with all the power and authority of a prophet, who was conscious of his high commission; and who knew that the Jews could not consistently reject his claim, without rejecting the authority of Moses and of their sacred writings, to whose testimony in his favour he confidently appealed. *We see him every where correcting the erroneous*

neous opinions and practices, which had corrupted the morality of his countrymen; and inculcating a more pure, explicit, uniform and entire scheme of religion, than had, hitherto, been ever collected together, or, perhaps, been known to mankind. We see him, moreover, laying open and explaining to his admiring bearers, in the words of him who sent him, the salutary scheme or method, which had been ordained by the divine wisdom to redeem and restore a sinful world to the favour of their Creatour, Governour and Judge; pressing upon them the happy effects of a sincere repentance, in consequence of this scheme of redemption; and assuring them of the sufficient assistance of the Holy Spirit, which should never be wanting to the earnest prayers and endeavours of the faithful. And, in the last place, we behold him exhorting, encouraging and authorising his apostles and followers to go unto all nations, and to make proselytes in his name; to publish to them the words which they had heard him speak, and to declare the mighty deeds which they had seen him perform; to proclaim the sure reward of everlasting life in a future state to all such, as should sincerely believe the divinity of his doctrines, and punctually obey his commands; and to denounce eternal misery to the stubbornly-unbelieving and disobedient.

S E C T. LII.

Jesus Christ was fully persuaded of his own extraordinary commission. His character as delivered in the writings of the apostles.

SUCH was the commission of Jesus Christ, as his disciples received it from his own mouth, and have transmitted it to the world in the books before us. The first thing, therefore, to be enquired into is, *whether Christ himself was fully persuaded*

suaded of his extraordinary mission; whether he was sincere in his own belief of being divinely inspired; or, whether he was a crafty impostor, and acted with a concealed intention to deceive mankind by a well-contrived and well-conducted cheat?

Never, surely, was there a character upon earth more remote from all suspicion of fraud, artifice and imposture, than that of Jesus Christ. If we take the account of his life, as the principal circumstances of it are recorded in the writings of those, who were best acquainted with him; we shall find, in his whole behaviour, the most unblemished purity and sanctity of manners, an ardent zeal for the service and glory of God, and a disinterested benevolence towards all mankind. He was, moreover, humble, meek and condescending; gentle to all men and patient of contradiction: nor was there any thing which he more strictly forbad, or more severely rebuked in his followers, than a spirit of self-sufficiency, pride, domination, and contention for honours and pre-eminence*. *The plan of an impostor is a plan of selfishness; a plan of vanity, or of authority, or of sensuality, or of wealth, or of ambition*: but examine the conduct of Christ with the severest eye, and you will see nothing of the maxims and subtleties of worldly wisdom and policy relatively either to himself, or his followers. As he used no insinuating arts to ingratiate himself with the rich, the great or the learned; so neither did he study to secure the assistance or protection of any of those religious factions into which his country was divided, or to captivate the favour of the people: but with an equal and impartial severity he re-

* See Dr. Leland against the Moral Philosopher, and his other most useful writings.

buked the reigning vices, and contradicted the most favoured prejudices of the whole age and nation wherein he lived. Self-denial, and the mortification of the appetites and passions were constantly insisted upon as essential conditions of becoming, and continuing, his disciples. In his exhortations to his profelytes he prepared them to expect daily reproaches, poverty and persecution in this world; whilst the rewards, which he promised to them for their fidelity and steady adherence to his words and doctrines, were removed to a great distance, were entirely of a spiritual nature, and by no means fitted to work upon the affections of the generality of mankind; for they were such as arose from the testimony of a good conscience, a sense of the divine love and favour here, and the perfection of holyness and happiness in the vision and enjoyment of the Deity in a future state—These are not the artifices of an impostor!

S E C T. LIII.

That Christ was not an enthusiast may be collected from his words and works.

BUT though the integrity of *the Christiau law-giver*, and the undesigning innocence of his life, will thoroughly acquit him with every candid person of the imputation of being concerned either in contriving, or in carrying on a scheme of wilful fraud: yet, certainly, it will be laying too great a weight upon this argument, to conclude from thence alone that his pretensions were well-founded; that he was really inspired from above, and that his words were the awful suggestions of almighty God. For many good men, it is known, men of the best and most upright intentions, have

have sometimes suffered their judgements to be hurried away by the strength of their imaginations, and have weakly mistaken the workings of their own fancies for the illuminations of heaven. Notwithstanding, therefore, the most specious appearances of sanctity, and the loudest claim of inspiration, we have still a right to suspend our belief, and even to deny our assent to the important article of Christ's divine mission, until we are entirely satisfied, that *as he was not a cunning impostor, so neither was he a weak enthusiast*. Once more, then, let us have recourse to the books of the New Testament, which are still lying open before us; let us examine well his doctrines, and meditate with attention upon his discourses, and then honestly ask ourselves—can any thing be more weighed, more unaffected, more uniform, more reasonable and more consistent with themselves, and with one another, than they are? Can any thing be more free from all those unintelligible, flighty, rapturous and ecstatic expressions, which usually distinguish the dreams of the entranced visionary from the genuine dictates of heaven-born reason? In the mind of Christ no inequality appears, nothing of melancholy which imposes upon some, or of pride, presumption and arrogance, which abuse so many others; but, on the contrary, a regular train of consistent thinking runs through all his words, and a sober prudence reigns in his whole behaviour. Could a mere *enthusiast* have persuaded the multitude of the Jews to believe, that he made the blind to see; the deaf to hear; the dumb to speak, and the lame to walk? Could *an enthusiast* have raised the dead to life? Could *an enthusiast* have known what was in the hearts of other people, or have prophesied of his own death and resurrection with all the attending circumstances?

stances? Could an *enthusiast* have foretold the approaching destruction of Jerusalem, the dispersion of the Jewish nation and the future success of his own doctrines? Read the history of Jesus Christ, and you will find the heavens, the earth, the sea, and all the powers of nature standing ready to obey his commands: like the almighty Creatour, in the beginning, he spake the word only, and it was done.

S E C T. LIV.

Christ's works were actual changes made in the laws of nature by the immediate interposition of God. The insufficiency of all other causes to account for these works.

THEY are therefore the works of Christ, so various in their kind and frequently repeated; so extensive and beneficial in their influence, and so lasting and examinable in their effects—they are *the miracles of Christ*, performed in the most open and publick places of resort, in the midst of populous cities, and before declared enemies, engaged by every motive of inclination, passion and interest to detect the fraud, had there been any room to have done it—they are *the many sensible changes made by Christ in the ordinary and fixed laws of nature, which afford the most infallible assurance, which can be either demanded or given, that he was neither an impostor nor an enthusiast*; that he was not deceived himself in the high claim, which he made, to divine inspiration, nor acted with an intention to deceive other people; that, agreeably to his professions, he was sent from God with authority to teach mankind a new and more perfect rule of religious faith and action; and

that God was with him, in an extraordinary manner, in all things which he said and did in his name. For that Christs mighty works, as they are represented in the gospels, may be accounted for agreeably to the common course of Providence, and the known laws of nature; that they may, *any ways*, be accounted for, without the immediate interposition of an all-wise and almighty Being, is hardly possible to be conceived by any understanding person. *It is not possible to be conceived*, for instance, *that they were owing to magick, or to a superior skill in the occult qualities of bodies, their imperceptible attractions and repulsions, their mutual relations to and various operations upon each other.* For what is this magick, or power of conjuration, as it has been sometimes denominated? The world is now become too wise to suffer itself to be amused with idle and unmeaning terms to no purpose, but to deceive ourselves with a shew of science falsely so called. We know that every effect must have a cause; and that this cause (no matter how it operates) must be adequate, must be sufficient to produce the effect, or else that it is no cause at all—Are then the laws of nature, the laws originally imposed upon this wondrous system by its almighty Creatour, at the command, and under the controul of a weak, wretched, sinful and presumptuous mortal? Can the most profound and penetrating knowledge of the latent properties, and secret influences of herbs, or trees, or minerals; can the imaginary powers of a mere *name*, how sacred soever it may be, or the charms of I know not what fatal combination of letters, enable mere flesh and blood to say, with effect, to a man struck with the palsy, take up thy bed and walk? Or to one who was born blind, open thine eyes, and see? Or to another, who has lain four days dead in the grave, Lazarus come forth?

S E C T.

S E C T. LV.

The enquiry into the nature and cause of Christs miraculous works continued.

SCARCELY less weak, and insufficient is it to assert, that *Christ performed his mighty works by collusion, by juggle and a crafty imposition upon the senses of the bye-standers.* What juggling can stop the fury of the sea, when the waves thereof rage horribly; or calm the roaring of tempestuous winds? What place for collusion, or self-deception, could there possibly be in works done in the open day, and in the sight of the sun? in actions frequently repeated? in actions so momentous in themselves, so very different from each other, and so permanent in their consequences? in actions performed in the midst of many jealous, envious and powerful adversaries, who were continually lying in wait to entrap, and to expose the performer to the scorn and derision of his admiring followers? Or, could mere confidence in the skill and virtues of Christ, or a strong persuasion of his miraculous power in healing all sorts of distempers, if he really had not such a power, restore sight to persons, who had been born blind, or remove the most inveterate diseases in an instant, as it were? Certainly not; for whatever changes the activity of a lively fancy, and the force of a vigorous imagination may sometimes produce in the human constitution, by giving a new spring to the blood and humours; yet that they should confer hearing upon the deaf, or speech upon the dumb; or that they should operate in Lazarus, who had been four days dead, is impossible to be conceived. Nor shall we approach nearer to the true origin of

these mighty works, though, with the malicious Jews, we should insinuate, *that Christ might be assisted in the performance of them by the immediate aid of evil spirits.* How far, indeed, the power of these beings may extend, with respect to their influence upon the affairs of this earthly globe, is very difficult precisely to determine in our present dawn of knowledge. Thus much, however, we may with confidence conclude, that their agency is limited; that they are under a superiour controul; that they have bounds set them, which they cannot pass, and that there are certain works beyond the extent of their faculties to perform. Is, for instance, any being, who is not self-existent, all-wise and all-mighty, endued with a power of creation, and of giving breath and thought to the inanimate and inert particles of dust? But Christ did even this; he not only called other persons from death into life, but he raised himself, also, from the depth of the grave. So again; the salutary tendency of his doctrine; the avowed end of his coming into the world (to redeem mankind from the bondage of sin, and to form to himself a holy people peculiarly zealous of good works) and the benevolent principle, which invariably accompanied his works, all conspire to demonstrate, that he held no correspondence with, that he received no assistance whatever from, the malignant prince of infernal spirits. *But if the mighty works of Christ cannot be accounted for agreeably to the laws of nature, and the ordinary course of Gods providence; if they were not caused by the force of magick and conjuration, nor worked by the help of juggle and collusion between Christ and his followers; if they were not the casual productions of a strong fancy and warm imagination, nor brought about by the aid and cooperation of evil spirits—there remains, I think,*
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but one other possible way, by which they could be effected, and that is, by the finger of God, by the will and immediate interposition of the almighty Author of nature. No other cause, but this, is adequate to such extraordinary effects ; this is fully so. As therefore it is irrational to acquiesce in any other, so must it be thought equally irrational not to acquiesce in this. And shall we say now, that faith, grounded upon such an extraordinary and over-powering weight of evidence, is not founded upon argument ? Let the most wary and distrustful reasoner put himself, for a short moment, into the place of the apostles ; let him seriously and earnestly attend to the wonderful things, which they saw and heard ; and then let him deal sincerely with himself, and conscientiously determine, whether it would have been possible for him to have resisted the force and authority of the heavenly testimony ? Whether he also must have believed, that Christ was the Son of God, and that God was with him in all that he said and did ; and, in consequence of such belief, whether he also must not have become one of his devoted followers and disciples ?

S E C T. LVI.

The evangelists and apostles being the witnesses and publishers of Christs doctrines and works, proper enquiries are to be made concerning them, before we believe what is contained in their writings.

WHAT the apostles and evangelists had themselves seen and heard, full of the same divine spirit, which had influenced and animated the founder of their faith, we behold them with amazing zeal, diligence and earnestness, publishing to all the world, propagating with a rapi-

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dity of success hardly to be conceived, and committing to writing for the everlasting benefit of future generations. But *who are these apostles*, who press the miraculous actions of their master upon us with so much vehemence and authority? *What is their true character?* Are they persons, whose testimony we may with confidence rely upon? Are they men of unquestionable sense, integrity and religion? Men of a cool, sedate, discerning and rational turn of mind? Are they men, who had sufficient opportunity to inform themselves of the certainty of all the wonderful things, which they relate unto us of the life and actions, of the death and resurrection of Christ? What proof have we, that there was no combination, no conspiracy entered into and carried on amongst them, to impose upon the credulity of their fellow-creatures, by bearing witness to a series of imposture and cunningly-devised fables? What evidence have they offered to the world, that they were divinely commissioned to demand our belief of the doctrines delivered by them in their masters name, and to require us to regulate our religious practice by his precepts?

Having never seen the miracles of Christ ourselves, nor heard him preaching, nor been blessed with a particular revelation from heaven in our own persons, we have an unquestionable right to be entirely satisfied in every one of these articles, before we resign our faith to the testimony of the apostles, and give them full credit in matters so remote from our own times, so unknown to the ordinary experience of mankind, and so little similar to the usual manner, in which the divine Providence chooses to conduct itself towards the children of men.

S E C T. LVII.

Who the evangelists and apostles were. Their character.

ONCE more, then, let us have recourse to the sacred code of Christianity, and collect from thence the genuine history and character of the apostles. They were persons, who had been selected by Christ, upon his first entrance upon his holy office, to be his witnesses to the rest of the world of the doctrines, which they should hear him deliver, and of the mighty works, which they should see him perform in confirmation of the divinity of those doctrines. They attended upon him with the most persevering diligence, ardour and fidelity during the whole course of his ministry; they do not appear to have been ever absent from him; they heard all his words; to them were his religious discourses principally directed, and in their presence did he make the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the lame to walk, and the dead to live. *What, therefore, the apostles had heard with their ears, what they had beheld with their eyes, what their hands had handled of the word of life, what they had the concurrent testimony of all their senses to assure them of, that they testified to the world.* And as there is the strongest proof, that the apostles could not be deceived themselves in the unanimous testimony, which they bear to the miracles of Christ; so have we all the evidence, which can reasonably be demanded to convince us, that they had no intention to impose upon others, or to put a solemn and deliberate cheat upon mankind. For we may discern in them all those marks of undesigning probity and simplicity; of zeal for the ho-

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nour of God, the cause of truth and the good of their fellow-creatures, which render it almost impossible for us to suspect the veracity of persons, in whom such excellent qualifications are found. Their principal attention, their chief sollicitude was to recover mankind from idolatry and wickedness to the knowledge, love and adoration of the true God; to engage them to a life of purity, righteousness and charity; and to raise their hopes and desires above this vain and perishing earth to things invisible and eternal, though at the extreme peril of all that was near and dear to themselves.

S E C T. LVIII.

The great ambition of the apostles was to be reputed the disciples of Christ, and to bear testimony to his doctrines and miracles. In confirmation of their testimony the apostles were impowered to work miracles.

THE apostles of Christ, instead of seeking their own profit or glory, instead of indulging their vanity in propagating their own notions, opinions and inventions, instead of erecting themselves into heads and founders of a growing sect, never so much as speak in their own names, but give the whole merit of all that they say or do to their crucified Master: their highest ambition was to be reputed his disciples, nor did they ever assume a greater honour to themselves than that of being his faithful followers; than that of being ambassadors, sent by him to preach his words, to testify what they had seen and heard, and to publish his religion to the world. But what sufficient motive, what conceiveable temptation can be assigned, why they should act in this humble, lowly, self-denying
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and disinterested manner, (for certainly they were neither fools nor madmen) if they themselves had not been entirely persuaded of the truth of what they related, and had not looked upon themselves as divinely authorised, and under a sort of necessity, to act as they did; especially as they had been forewarned by the very Master, whose doctrines they delivered, and whose miracles they asserted, that their esteem, love and zeal for him would expose them, as in fact it did, to hatred, reproach and persecution both from the Jews and Gentiles, and even to death itself. *But what puts the veracity of the apostles quite out of doubt, and stamps the seal of heaven itself upon their testimony, are the miracles which they themselves were enabled to perform in the name of Christ, and by virtue of an authority derived from him.* Had they, indeed, referred their admiring followers to miracles, which nobody knew any thing of but themselves; to works done in an obscure corner of an obscure country, and before a few of their own associates, before such only, as had been already persuaded of the truth of Christs divine mission, there might have been some grounds for suspicion of fraud; there might have been some room to imagine, that the representation, which they gave of themselves, was not altogether fair and impartial. But when they dared to appeal, *in writing*, to a series of extraordinary facts done by them in the most knowing and populous cities of the Roman empire, and in the view of thousands even of their most prejudiced enemies; to a series of facts which were still capable of being examined into at the time of their appeal, we can want no stronger argument to convince us either of their truth and integrity, on the one hand, or of the soundness, coolness and sobriety of their judgement, on the other. For though a warm and over-heated imagination may so far

impose upon itself, as to apprehend that it sees visions, and hears revelations, when it does not; yet no persons in their senses, no persons who are capable of delivering to the world a rational and consistent scheme of moral and religious duty, such as we read in the New Testament, can be so far deceived by the power of fancy and a spirit of enthusiasm, as publickly to maintain, that they have made the blind to see, the lame to walk, and the dead to live, if there were no facts to vindicate the truth of such assertions—and if the human mind could be supposed capable of receiving such strong delusions, yet is it beyond all force of conception to imagine, that other persons could have been seriously imposed upon by the pretensions of madmen, without bearing their testimony against them, and taking speedy and effectual means to stop the progress of the growing falsehood.

S E C T. LIX.

The zeal with which the apostles bare testimony to the cause of Christ, could proceed from no other motives than their absolute conviction both of his divine authority, and of the reality of his miracles. If the testimony of the twelve apostles be false, it is as great a miracle, as any recorded to be done by Christ.

NOR ought it to lessen the authority of the apostles, or to detract from the high regard, which is usually payed to their evidence, should we hear it suggested, that they were *willing witnesses in the cause of Christ*, which they had undertaken to support; that they greatly interested themselves in the success of the commission, with which they were charged; that they looked upon their supreme happiness

happinefs as concerned in their zealous endeavours to propagate the miracles of the gospel, its doctrines and precepts, and that having haftily admitted an erroneous opinion, and flaked their credit upon it, they were afterwards refolved to maintain it, into whatever difficulties and hazards it might tend to plunge them. But how came the caufe of Chrift to be the caufe of the apoftles? and why did they fo greatly intereft themfelves in bearing testimony to his works, and in proving *his divinity*? Having been born to, and educated in, all the religious preposfeffions of the reft of their Jewish brethren, they could not have been perfuaded to embrace the *new faith* either by previous inclination from within, or temptation from without; they could not have been byaffed by any preconceived favour, or diflike; they were not drawn by affection, nor daunted by fear, nor blinded by profit; they were not charmed by flattery, nor tired by follicitation, nor feded by precedent or custom, nor perverted by any indirect means whatever. Nothing, therefore, but the moft thorough conviction of the divine authority of Jefus could have engaged them to have *departed from the religion of their anceftors, which they believed to be of divine origin*, and to have become the obedient difciples of a new mafter. Nor can fo hearty, fincere, confiftent and perfevering a conviction be afcribed to any other fufficient caufe, than to that demonftration which Chrift was every day offering to their fenfes by his miracles, that the almighty God was with him in all things. A fingle man, perhaps, to fupport the credit of a feft which he himfelf has founded, and to fecure its future fuccefs in the world, may be induced to defer a great deal to the falfe point of honour, and rather to incur the peril of his life, than to recede from an erroneous opinion, which
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he has once imagined and adopted. But that *twelve persons* who were not the founders of the religion they taught, and who, consequently, had not the point of honour to sustain : that *twelve persons*, who had had no education, who had been brought up to some of the meanest professions, who had never been accustomed to contemplation, and were not remarkable for their personal courage, should enter into a conspiracy, as it were, against their own present ease, interest and reputation ; and, in manifest contradiction to all their native prejudices, habits and connections, should boldly and successfully undertake to go through the known world preaching a *spiritual salvation* in the name, and by the command, of a person who had suffered an ignominious death upon the cross : that *twelve persons*, I say, (who certainly were neither fools nor madmen) should agree together to lay down their lives, if occasion required, in attestation of a series of facts, which they knew to be false ; and should nevertheless profess their hopes of being gloriously rewarded in a future state by a God, whom they themselves represent as a Being, with whom nothing can dwell that frameth, or propagateth a lye—is as great a miracle, as any interruption of the common course of nature. For no history has ever mentioned such a thing, nor has any man in any age ever had experience of a fact of this kind. Such an event, as has been above described, has something so extraordinary in it, and is so utterly repugnant to all the usual observation and experience of mankind, that there is not, perhaps, any one of all *Christ's miracles*, which is not, in its own nature, equally credible. The falsehood of a testimony so circumstanced would be as miraculous, as are the wonderful works themselves, the veracity of which this testimony is intended to establish.

S E C T. LX.

The evidence of the apostles in favour of Christs divine mission is not less credible, either on account of the concern and interest which they took in the propagation of his doctrines, or of their having been his constant companions and attendants whilst he was upon earth,

THE apostles, without doubt, greatly interested themselves in the publication and propagation of Christianity. *But of what nature and kind was the interest, which they took in this extraordinary affair? It was the expectation of an eternal reward in heaven hereafter, founded upon their bearing testimony to the truth, whilst they continued upon earth.* For as to worldly honours, riches and pleasures, they neither could, nor did flatter themselves, that any of these, the envied blessings of life, would ever fall to their share. On the contrary, Christ himself had plainly foretold, and consequently his whole credit with them, as a prophet, depended upon those very reproaches, bonds, imprisonments and deaths, which awaited their unshaken perseverance in the testimony, which they should bear to the gospel. Christians, indeed, the apostles were, and inseparable attendants upon their Master, from the moment wherein he first called them to be his disciples—and shall a circumstance, which is usually thought to add so much to the credibility of all other historians, be brought to disqualify them, from being faithful witnesses to the rest of the world of the things, which he said and did? Shall the evidence of the apostles be looked upon as incredible, and treated as unworthy our regard and assent, merely because they were sincerely convinced of the truth

truth of the facts which they tell us, acted constantly and consistently under their influence, and were ready and willing to lay down their lives in confirmation of them? But see whither this argument leads us, and what is the genuine conclusion, which is intended to be drawn from it. We are not to give any credit to what the apostles relate to us concerning Christ and his works; because, by acknowledging his divine mission and professing their stedfast belief of his miracles, their testimony must be supposed to be influenced by their fondness for the new opinions which they had embraced. Much less, certainly, are we to believe Jews and idolaters upon this important subject, persons who still continued in their infidelity. For they were equally prejudiced on the other side, and more ignorant than the former; and very reasonable is it to conclude, that what they did not believe themselves, they would endeavour, for their own justification, to represent in such a manner, as that other persons should pay as little regard to it as they did. Therefore we are to believe nobody upon the subject of Christianity, nor indeed, upon any other historical subject whatever. Englishmen, for this reason, are not to be trusted, when they write the history of England; nor Frenchmen to be credited when they compose the annals of France. But if we must suspend our assent to all past facts, until we meet with witnesses of such an absolute indifference, as is here imagined, we shall never be able to fix it at all—and should this proposition be once admitted to have any influence in the conduct of common life, it would be impossible for courts of justice ever to proceed to sentence; all mankind must be treated as knaves and impostors, and universal scepticism would be the unavoidable consequence.

S E C T. LXI.

The obstinacy of the unbelieving Jews, who were contemporaries of Christ and his apostles, no argument against the divine original of Christianity.

BUT does it not derogate, you will say, from the authority of the apostles, does it not afford some little room to suspect the veracity of what they tell us concerning their Master and themselves, that there were so many persons, both Jews and Gentiles, who heard their testimony, and saw the wonderful works which they performed, and yet still persisted in their unbelief? No candid and competent enquirer after truth will think that it does. For God, he knows, never acts towards his accountable creatures in such a manner, as to force their judgement, and irresistibly to influence their moral conduct; but, on the contrary, leaves them in all such instances, to the application of their rational powers, and to that freedom of will, which alone constitute the merit of religious faith and practice. It entirely depends upon our own volition, attention and diligence, whether we will shake off our natural indolence; whether we will exert our intellectual faculties, subdue our vicious inclinations, and rise superiour to the prejudices of education, passion and conversation. *It wholly depends upon our own resolution, upon the affections of the heart rather than the acuteness of the understanding, whether we will seriously and earnestly advert to the evidence which is offered in proof of religious truth, and candidly give it a fair, honest, and impartial examination.* To argue, therefore, either for the credibility, or the falsehood of any point of history or doctrine, merely from the numbers
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who receive or reject it, is a very fallacious way of informing the judgement ; and he must be very little acquainted with the usual course of the world, who has not found by his own experience, that as there are some men capable of swallowing the greatest absurdities ; so there are others equally notorious for questioning, denying and opposing the plainest truths. If, therefore, in the case before us, we consider the wickedness of *the Jews*, at the time when Christ made his appearance amongst them, as represented by their own historian Josephus ; their extravagant zeal for the credit of the Mosaic law ; their superstitious regard for the traditions of their forefathers, and the slavish deference which they paid to the heads of their sects—if we consider, likewise, the false notions which they entertained of the nature of miracles and their authority, and of the power of demons and the efficacy of physical causes—if we consider, moreover, the partial and wrong opinions, which universally obtained amongst them concerning the kingdom of the Messiah, and which could by no means be reconciled with the mean appearance of Jesus ; the difference in many essential points between their religious opinions and practices, and those prescribed and inculcated by Christ and his apostles ; their indolent inattention to the most important duties of *internal religion*, and their unfitness for making moral inquiries on account of the narrowness of their principles ; the inconveniencies, difficulties and persecution, which must necessarily attend the profession of a new institution, which was to supersede that of their ancient lawgiver ; and the particular interest, which the rulers of the nation had to prevent the propagation of a religion so derogatory to that advantageous domination which they exercised

cised over the consciences of their countrymen--by him, I say, who has so much regard for truth, as to weigh all these concurring circumstances well in his mind, the obstinacy of the infidel Jews will not be thought so strong an argument against the divine original of Christianity, as the conversion of so many of them to the faith of Christ will be looked upon as a demonstration of the miracles, which must have been made use of to extirpate prejudices so widely extended, and so deeply rooted. *

S E C T. LXII.

The obstinacy of the unbelieving Gentiles, who were contemporaries with Christ and his apostles, no objection to the truth of Christianity.

MUCH in the same manner may we argue, likewise, with regard to the Gentile nations. For besides the causes of unbelief, which were common to them with the Jews, such as a great corruption of morals; the prepossessions of education; the purity of the precepts of the gospel entirely opposite to their vicious inclinations and practices; the temporal inconveniencies which attended the profession of Christianity, and the temporal advantages, which might be secured or obtained by rejecting and opposing it; the mean appearance, which Christ made in the world, and his ignominious death, which they knew not how to conciliate with the divine power ascribed unto him by his disciples--besides these, I say, they had many other causes of unbelief peculiar to themselves. They entertained a high notion of the efficacy of

* See Dr. Fortins discourses upon the truth of the Christian Religion.

magick, of the strength of charms and incantation, and of the almost-uncontroulable power of their demons and demi-gods; they were extremely careless and indifferent about all religion in general, as such, having very imperfect notions of the divine Being, and of the spiritual adoration, which was due to him alone; and were moreover offended at the unsociableness of Christianity, and its utter incompatibility with the established worship of their several countries. Their great and powerful men, likewise, for want of attending to the intrinsic merits of the new doctrine, and of understanding it thoroughly, were not able to reconcile it with their particular views and interests; much less was it to be expected, that the priests, sacrificers and artisans, who lived by the profits of idolatry, would readily open their eyes and ears to receive a faith so utterly subversive of their present gain. Nor would the bad opinion, which other nations, in general, had conceived of the Jews, permit them easily to pass a favourable judgement upon the Christians, whom they did not, at first, sufficiently distinguish from that despised people. The antiquity, likewise, of paganism, and the many distinguished blessings, which, it was imagined, the propitious influence of their heroes and gods had from time to time conferred upon their several countries, together with the simple and artless manner made use of by the first Christians, and their followers, to propagate a religion, which had nothing in its external appearance to recommend it, may be added to the causes, which contributed to lessen the force of the miracles worked by Christ and his apostles, and prevented no small numbers of the rich, the great and the learned, from giving in their names
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amongst the earliest converts to the faith and obedience which is in Jesus.*

S E C T. LXIII.

The writings of the evangelists and apostles connect us with the times of Christ, and make it reasonable for us to believe and act as if we ourselves had seen his miracles and heard his words.

BUT this is not our case; we have, happily, none of those obstinate prejudices to encounter and subdue, which both Jew and Gentile formerly laboured under. Taught by true philosophy we know the genuine power of miracles, and readily acknowledge, that where they are certain, uncontrouled and uncontradicted, they are the strongest arguments which can be urged, *they are indeed infallible arguments, in proof of a providential and omnipotent interposition.* We are therefore firmly persuaded, that had we lived in the days of the apostles; that had we heard their words, and seen the mighty works which they performed in vindication of the divine authority which breathed in them, we should not have entertained the least doubt of the competency of their united testimony either in point of information, integrity, or veracity; but should have sincerely believed all things which they related concerning their Master, and, full of the hopes of a blessed immortality in another state, should have adhered to the new doctrine, in spite of all the variety of opposition and persecution, which every where threatened it—and we should have done well; for to act upon sufficient evidence, to act upon the highest degree of

* See Dr. Fortin, as above.

probability, is to act reasonably and wisely ; it is to follow the sure guidance of that celestial light, which heaven itself has given to us to direct our moral conduct ; it is to comply with the will of almighty God himself. Shall we not, therefore, pay an equal reverence, regard and credit to the undoubted writings of the evangelists, wherein the doctrines of Christ are contained in his own words, and his works faithfully recorded by eye-witnesses of them ? *Whilst we have the genuine volumes of the evangelists and apostles to have recourse to for our information and instruction, all the intermediate space of time between us and them, (how great soever it may be supposed to be) is annihilated, as it were, and thrown quite out of the question.* For these books transport us, at once, into the land of Judea, and to the age of the apostles. By their means, we become contemporaries of Christ himself and his disciples ; we hear them preaching, and behold their extraordinary works. Supposing ourselves to be fully convinced, that the *New Testament*, such as we at present have it, was really written by the apostles of Christ, and that it is a pure and uncorrupted representation of his life and discourses ; that it was composed, whilst great numbers of the persons, who had felt the benefit of the miracles recorded in it, remained living monuments of the writers veracity ; and that it was made publick in the midst of the professed enemies of Christianity, who wanted neither inclination, nor opportunity, nor power to examine into the truth of the facts alledged, and to convict the writers of falsehood, had there been any room to have done it—the rest is all easy, clear, and obvious ; and whether we read the united and concurring testimony of the apostles drawn up under their own hands in the books above-mentioned,

tioned, and sealed with the seal of God in the miracles, which they were enabled to perform, or had heard them pronounce it themselves, our general conclusion cannot but be the same, namely, that God was with Christ in an extraordinary manner, and that the highest deference, veneration, and obedience are to be payed to his doctrines and commandments.

S E C T. LXIV.

The books of the New Testament are the genuine and authentick works of those evangelists and disciples of Christ whose names they bear.

NOW that the books of the New Testament are genuine and authentick; that they were composed by the persons whose names they bear, and published amongst the people of the Jews very soon after the great events mentioned in them had happened, and that they have been faithfully transmitted to us without any fundamental alteration, we have every argument to convince us, which the most scrupulous examination can reasonably call for. The most ancient copies of these books were invariably found with the names of the several evangelists and apostles prefixed to them, as we see at present; and under the same names have they been uniformly quoted through all the ages of ecclesiastical antiquity. They were written to large bodies of men, and regularly read to them in all their stated assemblies, which were very frequent, and upon their solemn festivals. They were not addressed to particular persons to be kept carefully locked up by them, and by them only to be seen, produced and explained upon extraordinary occasions, like the Sibylline oracles; but,

whilst the originals were preserved in the archives of the church, faithful transcripts of them were immediately published and dispersed into as many hands as possible, into the hands of enemies as well as friends; and to render them still more known, more generally understood and more useful, they were soon translated into many different languages. Every individual Christian thought himself interested in them, procured a copy of them, if he could, committed them to his memory, regarded them as the sole foundation of his faith, revered them as his only vindication for falling off from the religion of his fore-fathers, and watched over them with a holy earnestness, as over his choicest treasures. They have been constantly and continually appealed to as the sacred and infallible oracles of God by all nations, sects, factions and parties, in all ages and places wherever Christianity has been professed. Both orthodox and hereticks, however irreconcilable they may have differed in the sense and meaning of certain parts of these writings, have nevertheless with one common consent, acknowledged their genuine and divine authority, referring their various disputes, (unsuccessfully indeed) to their decision. Even the professed enemies of Christianity, whether Jews or Gentiles, in the contentions with the early propagators and defenders of the Christian religion, have never called the authenticity of these records in question. *Is not, then, a claim so uninterrupted, so universal, so unanimous and so constant, sufficient to establish the genuineness of the books of the New Testament? And can volumes so circumstanced, as these were even from their first publication, and guarded with so severe and holy a jealousy, possibly be corrupted in any essential point of doctrine or fact? Either, therefore, we must allow that these writings*
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are really such as they are generally taken for, that is, that they were written by the several evangelists and disciples of Christ, *according to their titles*; or we must assert, that nothing left us by antiquity can be known to be true, that nothing left us by antiquity is credible. Different readings, undoubtedly, there are in these books in no small numbers; nor could it easily have happened otherwise, as the transcribers of them must frequently have been unlearned men, and not always attentive to the business they were engaged in: but these numerous variations of the written copies from one another, (as is well known to, and acknowledged by, every competent judge of these matters,) tend rather to amend and restore the true reading of the original text, than to change and corrupt it. *They are principally in the grammatical construction; in the manner of spelling or placing the words, and in other unimportant matters, relative to ornament and sound, rather than to the sense.* For let us choose as perversely as we can amongst all these variations of the text, and we shall not be able to select a single different reading, which, if admitted, will introduce any material change, either in the doctrinal or preceptive part of the Christian religion; or which will render doubtful any of the principal facts, upon which our faith is founded.*

* See Dr. Bentley's *Phileleutherus Lipsiensis*.

S E C T. LXV.

Every book of the New Testament either expressly contains or manifestly alludes to the principal facts upon which Christianity is founded. These facts are confirmed also by universal tradition, attested by the earliest institutions of the church, and acknowledged by both Jews and Gentiles.

I Am not here going to enquire into the exact number of the canonical books of the New Testament; nor to examine into the reasons of the decrees, which have been made upon this subject by the early councils of Christianity; nor to expatiate upon the moral and intellectual abilities of those ancient fathers of the church, by whom these volumes have been universally, unanimously and constantly quoted, explained and handed down to us as of *divine authority*. These and other disquisitions of a similar nature, though curious, entertaining and useful in their proper place, are certainly not necessary in the general review, which we are here making, of the grounds and reasons of Christianity. All that we want to be fully convinced of, in the present enquiry, is, whether there be evidence sufficient to demonstrate, *that there ever existed such a person as Jesus Christ; that he instituted a new religion in consequence of an immediate revelation, which he claimed to have received from God; that he worked miracles in attestation of the authority of this commission, and that he rose from the dead, as he had foretold, after having been ignominiously crucified by the Jews.*—For if we are entirely satisfied of the truth of *these fundamental propositions*, the rest will follow of course; we must believe and confess, that this
Christ

Christ was sent from God to lead mankind into the way of truth and happiness; and, if we will act consistently with this faith, we must live the lives of Christians. And so great is the cloud of witnesses which may be produced from the New Testament in attestation of these several facts, that it is, I think, quite impossible for any candid and impartial enquirer seriously to doubt concerning the truth of them. They are either distinctly related, or plainly alluded to in every book of the New Testament; *not in the Gospels, or in the Acts, or in the Epistles only, but in all these different writings of different authors, and that not once or twice, in passing as it were, but frequently, uniformly and invariably.* We have, moreover, the uninterrupted voice of tradition in confirmation of them; we have the universal consent of every congregation of Christians, wheresoever dispersed over the world, acknowledging and appealing to them as the basis of their faith; and we have the most substantial monuments, instituted in the first ages of Christianity, and continually observed in commemoration and attestation of them, such as *baptism, the supper of the Lord, and the Christian passover.* Every sect and party of Christians, various as they are and mutually disagreeing in all other respects, equally confess them to be true, insisting upon, and arguing from them as such. That Jesus Christ performed many extraordinary works, during his abode upon earth, was allowed by every enemy of his religion, both Jew and Gentile, who endeavoured to account for them either by natural means, or by magick, or by a diabolical interposition—And, to complete the important argument, such has been the religious state of a great part of mankind, since the period of Christ's coming into the world, as cannot,

I humbly apprehend, be otherwise accounted for, than upon the supposition of the reality of the miracles performed by Christ and his apostles.

S E C T. LXVI.

The early and successful propagation of Christianity cannot be accounted for, but upon the supposition of the reality of the miracles performed by Christ and his apostles.

IN the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Cæsar, the whole world, as far as we are acquainted with its ancient history, were either Pagans or Jews; were either devoted to the worship of material representations of the gods, or acknowledged the law of Moses, as their only rule of duty and religious obedience. And behold! within twenty years afterwards, a new religion introduced and forcing its way with amazing success into almost every province of the Roman empire. Now if this be a fact, which cannot be disputed, is it not reasonable to enquire, how so extraordinary an event was produced, and by what powerful and sufficient means this important revolution in the religious state of mankind was effected? *Was, then, the sudden and wide diffusion of Christianity owing to the ignorance of the times, when it was first published, and to the meanness of the understanding, the weakness and incapacity of the persons, to whom it was originally taught?* certainly not. For the theatre, upon which the apostles principally acted, was the most learned, the best-instructed and civilized part of the earth. Their discourses were directed to nations, where philosophy, depth of thought, and the liberal arts had made a considerable progress. They performed

performed their miracles; they preached and made converts to the faith of Christ not merely in the obscure villages and towns of Judea, but in the famous cities of Antioch, Corinth, Thessalonica, Athens, and in Rome itself the seat of literature, and even in Cæsars household. We know, indeed, as well from other instances as from the speedy and extensive propagation of Mohammedism, what mighty and quick changes have been brought about in the religion of states by the arms even of a few enthusiasts, actuated (as they imagined) by the Spirit of God, and firmly persuaded, that the joys of Paradise would be the certain reward of a merit, founded upon their zealous endeavours to subdue all the rest of the world to the same mode of faith with themselves—*But the apostles of Christ* (though their design was no less than to turn all nations, whithersoever they came, to the belief of the divine mission of their Master) *utterly disclaimed, both in word and in deed, all violent and harsh methods of proceeding; all force and compulsion upon the human conscience, and all conversions made by the terror of punishment and the sword.* The weapons of their warfare were the reasonableness of the doctrines which they delivered, the authority of the high name by whose commission they preached, and the miraculous works which they were enabled to perform; nor did they use any other arms to conquer the virulence of their enemies and to gain profelytes to the faith, except patience, meekness, humility, submission to civil power in all things lawful, and universal good will to mankind. Primitive Christianity had none of those gaudy shews, or of that outward pomp of rites and splendour of ceremonies, which are so apt to attract the eyes and admiration of the multitude, and which, we may be sure, it would not have

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have been entirely without, had it been cunningly-devised by worldly politicians: on the contrary, it was plain, simple, unadorned, clear and intelligible to every capacity, without any allurement to invite believers, but its own intrinsic excellence, and the evidence of miracles.

S E C T. LXVII.

The apostles of Christ did not fall in with the prejudices of Jews or Gentiles, in order to gain proselytes.

SO far were the apostles of Christ from falling in with the deeply-rooted prejudices of their *Jewish hearers*, that, on the contrary, they denounced unto them a suffering Messiah, whose kingdom was purely spiritual, and whose laws were righteousness; and proclaimed every where the approaching abolition of the Mosaick dispensation, the destruction of the holy city and temple, and the accession of the Gentiles to all the privileges of the peculiar people of God. So again, instead of labouring to convert *the heathen nations* by indulging them in practices inconsistent with the doctrines of the gospel, by compromising the difference between the two religions, and melting them down into one, they absolutely forbid them to retain the least communication, or to have any fellowship with those favourite idols, whom they had hitherto been taught to look up to, as the founders, benefactors and guardians of their several states. To their proselytes, in general, the only promise which they made with regard to the present world, was the divine comfort and support under the variety of hardships, persecutions and death, which would assuredly attend their sincere confession *of the faith*; nor were they taught
to

to expect happiness in that future state, which was approaching, unless they acted consistently with what they professed to believe ; unless they were zealous to adorn their new religion with good works, and uniformly complied with the will of God, in contradiction to all those corrupt inclinations and vicious passions, in which they had hitherto been unreflectingly indulging themselves. As in the discipline of the gospel, the supremest bliss of heaven was assigned to the faithful and obedient Christian ; so was eternal misery pronounced, in the holy oracles, as the certain lot and portion of those indolent, wicked and careless servants, who knew their Masters will, and did it not.

And yet, notwithstanding this conduct of the apostles, so contrary to the arts and maxims of religious missionaries ; notwithstanding all the difficulties, discouragements and obstacles, which stood in the way of the propagation of the gospel ; notwithstanding the continued opposition, which it met with from the learning and subtlety of the *philosophers* ; from the artifices and influence of the *priests* ; from the bigotry and superstition of the *vulgar* ; from the power of the magistrate, and the vicious appetites and passions of all, without a single worldly advantage to recommend it—*within twenty years* after it was first preached, it had gained vast multitudes of converts of all ranks and conditions, high and low, learned and unlearned, so that large congregations of the faithful were established in almost every flourishing city of the Roman empire. That, therefore, the despised doctrine of a crucified lawgiver prevailed so universally against the allurements of flesh and blood, the blandishments of the world, the writings of the learned and the persecution of the great and powerful, will ever be regarded

garded by all competent judges as an irrefragable argument that its original was divine, and its Protector almighty.

S E C T. LXVIII.

The Christian institution could not possibly have been the invention of such persons, as the apostles were, but must have been communicated to them in an extraordinary manner.

TO reform a few corruptions in the religion of a nation, and to make material alterations in the established worship even of a single people, has always been looked upon as a work of so much difficulty, that it may be attempted a hundred times without success, and can never be accomplished without an extraordinary concurrence of circumstances. But to persuade many nations, all different from one another in their languages, manners and customs, entirely to quit the religion of their ancestors for an absolutely new mode of faith and practice; and to induce whole kingdoms to despise and forsake the deities, whom their forefathers had been immemorially accustomed to reverence and adore, has something in it, which must appear little less than naturally impossible to him, who has well considered the strength of prejudices founded in education, and the inflexible stubbornness of superstition. The man, therefore, who can persuade himself to believe, that such persons, as the apostles of Christ, were able, by the strength of their own natural powers, to have invented such an institution as Christianity, without the assistance of that extraordinary revelation from heaven, which, they assure us, they were favoured with—or, that they could have drawn such striking

striking pictures of virtue, innocence and true magnanimity, as are extant in their works, unless they had closely copied from the life itself—or, that they could have dared to have described, and appealed to, a series of miracles so materially circumstantial as to times, places and names, and so utterly unlike any thing of the same kind, which had ever been heard of before either in the Jewish or pagan history, unless they had had the facts themselves before their eyes to have directed their pens—or, that they could have ever carried so extensive a plan of religious communion into effect with such an astonishing rapidity of success, unless God had been with them, in the manner they mention, confirming and bearing witness to the truth of their testimony by signs and wonders following—or, that such vast numbers of all ranks, degrees, qualities and accomplishments, should be converted to a system of religious notions and practices, contrary to all their worldly views and interests, without thoroughly examining the facts, upon which this system was founded, and without being able to have detected the imposture, had there been one—The man, I say, who can persuade himself *unfeignedly* to believe all this, cannot I am sure, be said to want credulity, whatever else he may be deficient in, candour, I mean, impartiality, ingenuous freedom of thought and a sincere love of truth, with a resolution to follow its divine light, whithersoever its bright beams shall point the sacred way. And, consequently, *an infidelity so unreasonable as is here supposed, a blind, careless, self-sufficient and unexamining infidelity, cannot but be highly criminal in the sight of that Being, who has furnished us with the proper powers to search out his whole will, and will certainly demand a strict account both of the neglect, and of the abuse, of the talents, which he has committed*

mitted to our charge. Every effect, in the moral as well as natural world, calls for an adequate cause of its production, nor will a man of reason and wisdom rest satisfied in his enquiries, till he be arrived at such sufficient cause. If then in the instance before us, we suppose, that Christ and his apostles did really perform the extraordinary works, which, we are told, they performed, the rise, growth and progress of Christianity will be plain and easily accounted for; nor shall we be involved in a series of difficulties, which, without such a supposition, will ever remain inexplicable and incomprehensible. In that case, we shall no longer wonder at the swift-spreading propagation of the gospel; we shall not wonder, that every enquiring, honest, and impartial lover of truth, who either saw these mighty works himself, or was convinced by other evidence, that they really had been done, should immediately rise superiour to all secular considerations and prejudices; and, notwithstanding the certain hazard which, he knew, his sincerity would incur, should become the faithful disciple of Christ, and obey his commands, *as the commands of one sent by God, in an extraordinary manner, for the instruction and everlasting benefit of mankind.*

S E C T. LXIX.

To the external evidence in favour of a traditional revelation, the internal evidence ought likewise to be added. The doctrines and precepts of a traditional revelation are to be examined by the principles of right reason, before they are assented to.

THUS far have we considered and examined, with all possible caution, circumspection and impartiality, *the external evidence, which may be*
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urged in favour of the Christian religion; that it was originally revealed from heaven; that its doctrines and precepts are the genuine suggestions of a divine inspiration, and that it has been faithfully transmitted to posterity in the writings of the evangelists and apostles. And can you now say, upon the most serious and attentive recollection, either that the arguments, which have been produced, are not the best and most proper to prove the several points, as they came before you; or, that they have appeared to you, in any point, defective and insufficient? If *miracles* are universally confessed to be a satisfactory and unequivocal attestation of the immediate presence and interposition of almighty God, in favour of the divine authority of him who is suffered to perform them—*whatever definition of miracles you fix upon, such will be allowed to be the extraordinary works done by Christ and his apostles.* And, most sure I am, if *historical evidence* of the existence of past events can, in any case whatever, be admitted, it must be admitted in favour of the events, upon which Christianity is founded. For there is not a single circumstance wanting, which the most curious, difficult and inquisitive enquirer can *reasonably* call for, to prove the authenticity of the principal and most essential doctrines, precepts and miracles of the gospel.—Too careful indeed, I own, you can hardly be in a matter of so much consequence to your greatest happiness; nor can you, perhaps, take too many precautions, before you fully resign your faith even to the best-grounded claim of a traditionary revelation. Was, indeed, a divine revelation to be made immediately to yourself with all that blaze of conviction, with which the Father of light and truth would, probably, accompany it, you would ask no other evidence to assure you, that such a revelation would
be;

be, in every respect, worthy the all-perfect Being from whom it was derived; and, consequently, you would pay, at once, the most unreserved reverence and submission to the high information, without further examination, and without delay. Nor, were you to see a series of miracles performed with your own eyes, in support of a particular system of doctrine, would you think it necessary to demand any other arguments to convince you, that the performer was assisted by heaven, and it was your indispensable duty to believe, and to obey, whatever he should deliver to you in the name of the holy Being, who had enabled him, without controul or contradiction, to work these miracles in your sight. But this not being your case, nor the case of any part of mankind, at present, *to the external proof in attestation of the truth of a traditionary revelation, you have a right likewise to join, what is usually and properly called, the internal evidence*: you have an undoubted claim to examine the doctrines and precepts themselves by those rules of right reason, which you know to be the will of God, before you hastily resolve either to believe the one, or to obey the other. For though the reasonableness and excellent tendency of a religious system of faith and practice will not, *alone*, be sufficient to prove that such religious system was, in fact, revealed from heaven in an extraordinary manner: yet if such institution, after the most nice and accurate trial, appear to have all the marks and proofs of a divine revelation, which a divine revelation, supposing it to be true, could reasonably be imagined or expected to have—such intrinsic goodness will yield a strong presumption in its favour, and afford no small aid to the historical testimonies, which may be separately urged in its support, and both together

together will amount to little less than an absolute demonstration, that such religious system was really revealed by God in an extraordinary manner.

S E C T. LXX.

What is not reasonable to be expected from a new revelation of Gods will; what may reasonably be expected from it.

FOR though it be not difficult to conceive, that, in our present imperfect state of existence and knowledge, a new revelation of Gods will, distinct from that which is discovered to every man by the light of reason, should contain some things (in the *doctrinal part* especially) hard to be comprehended, understood, and fully explained: yet thus much is certain, that it can, in no respect whatever, contradict any former discovery, which God may have made of his will, either ordinary or extraordinary; that it must be in all things harmoniously consistent with itself; that its end must be perfective of the human nature, and its means practicable, and well adapted to promote that truest glory of God, which results from the highest happiness of his creatures. Let it be observed, however, that it is by no means reasonable to expect, that such a revelation should comprehend an accurate theory of the mechanical constitution of the visible world; that it should treat of things, either moral or natural, with a philosophical precision and exactness; that it should depart from the usual phraseology of the age, or country, wherein it is published, and introduce a new set of terms, equally unknown to the wise and vulgar; or that it should adapt itself to the fashionable systems of logick and rhetoric, taught

in the schools of the learned. For such a deviation from the common and received notions and language, in circumstances not essential to the great ends for which the revelation was intended, would answer no good purpose at all; but, on the contrary, would draw off the attention both of the hearer and reader from the more interesting matters of religion and morality, to fix them upon subjects, which did not so intimately concern them, and of which the exactest knowledge would not, of itself, render them either better or more happy men. The great end of all Gods revelations, whether ordinary or extraordinary, being to make men wise unto salvation; if nothing be wanting to accomplish this end, there can be no reason to complain, that the stile of our instruction is rude and unpolished, or that the common methods of arguing are not observed. He who undertakes to teach others, and has no authority besides that which he can obtain by raising in them a good opinion of his understanding and abilities, should omit none of those arts of persuasion, which ingenious and learned men have so advantageously cultivated, that he may set truth in the fairest light: but he who comes from God, and to whom God bears testimony, has no occasion for these methods of gaining credit. He ought to be heard with reverence and submission, though his bodily presence should be weak, and his speech contemptible. His natural imperfections are, in one respect, a recommendation of him, as they tend to prove, that his doctrines are not of his own invention.*

* See *Bishop of Londons discourses.*

S E C T. LXXI.

The nature, spirit and tendency of the Christian doctrines, as taught by Christ himself, and by his apostles in his name.

HOW far, then, the Christian institution has this internal evidence in proof and vindication of the divinity of its original; how far its ends and motives, its doctrines and duties are agreeable to our best notions of the Deity, suitable to the dictates of right reason, and conducive to the perfection and happiness of mankind, we shall soon be able to judge from the general review, which we will now go on to take, of its nature, spirit and tendency, as it was taught by Christ himself, and by his apostles in his name. *The religion of the gospel is the religion of persons, who, being placed in a state of trial and probation, often fall from their integrity. It is the religion of sinners, and is mercifully intended both to give us infallible assurances of our future immortality in another state, and likewise to ease us of all anxiety, on account of our frequent transgressions of the law, by pointing out to us the efficacious means, by which God vouchsafes to accept our sincere repentance, to blot out our past guilt, and to be entirely reconciled to us. The religion of the gospel is designed to fill us with a holy ambition to obey the divine will in all things, and to declare, from the highest authority, both what we are to believe, and what we are to do, in order to obtain salvation.* With this view and for these gracious purposes, at the time appointed by infinite wisdom, God in an extraordinary manner sent his beloved Son into the world (whose coming had been long foretold by the

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Jewish prophets under the character of the Messiah) to instruct mankind, as his messenger, in every branch of their duty; to exhibit to them in his life, conversation and instructions, a perfect model of universal piety, goodness and purity; *to make an adequate atonement for their sins by his own unflinching obedience to the divine commandments, and by his meritorious sufferings and death*; and to give to them a certain pledge and conviction of a future resurrection, and of the happiness prepared for good men hereafter, by his own resurrection from the dead, ascension into heaven, and exaltation to glory. We are moreover taught in the sacred volumes of our faith, that in the name of Christ, as our only advocate, we are to offer up all our prayers and praises to the throne of grace; that, through his powerful mediation and intercession for us, we can alone hope to be justified in the sight of God, and to obtain the favourable acceptance of our imperfect services; that, in and through him, God is pleased to communicate to true believers the blessings of his grace, and the aids of his Holy Spirit; and that he also is appointed to raise the dead, at the last day, to judge the world in his Father's name, and to dispense eternal rewards and punishments to all mankind, according to their works done in the flesh.

Such is the general plan and outlines of the Christian doctrine, as it stands distinguished from all other religions, and is proposed to our belief in the records of the gospel. Examine it well; bring it to the severest tribunal of candid and impartial reason; and then tell me, whether you can perceive any thing in it, which is not entirely reconcileable to the essential attributes of the Deity, his wisdom, goodness, justice and righteousness; any thing which is not perfectly agreeable to the nature and circumstances of guilty man; and which

is not well-adapted to raise in us every holy affection of reverence, love and gratitude, and to inflame our zeal, (by an unreserved submission to the divine commands) to attain those everlasting mansions of bliss, which are proposed, as the ultimate end of all our actions?

S E C T. LXXII.

The nature, spirit and tendency of the Christian precepts, as taught in the writings of the New Testament.

I F from the principal doctrines of Christianity, we turn our eyes, in the next place, to its precepts, to the rule of life, which it has laid down for the direction of its followers—here we shall find every thing taught, recommended and enforced, which is right, fitting and decent in itself; every thing which is amiable, beneficial and laudable—here we shall find every thing pressed upon our obedience, which is worthy the divine Being, and suitable to his great design of glorifying himself in the common happiness of all his creatures. The gospel of Christ is one continued lesson of the strictest piety, justice, benevolence and universal charity. The leading precepts of Christianity being founded in the nature of man are, in general, plain, obvious, easy to be performed, and, in all respects, consonant to the voice of sound reason. They require no extraordinary austerities; no irregular strains of devotion; no unintelligible ecstasies; no perverse and wayward contradiction to the innocent customs of the world; no petulant gainsaying of civil authority in matters indifferent: but are, in all things, gentle, modest, peaceable, humble and obedient to lawful superiours. Chri-

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tianity utterly rejects all envy, pride, malice, arrogance and self-wisdom. *With respect to the almighty Creator of the universe,* our indulgent Parent, our righteous Governour and continual Benefactor, it particularly enjoins the most sincere and uniform love, reverence, gratitude, trust, resignation, devotion, obedience and repentance. *To our fellow-creatures* it commands us to be universally benevolent, compassionate, placable, beneficent, meek, peaceable, candid and courteous. Nor can any precepts, relative *to the duty we owe ourselves,* be productive of more real pleasure and delight to us, than are those of being humble and modest in our opinions of ourselves; calm and composed in our passions; sober and temperate in our enjoyments; and patient and contented in our stations; all which the Christian doctrine frequently and earnestly inculcates. No other method can raise us so near to heaven and happiness, whilst we are upon earth, as that which the gospel points out to us, namely, to abstract and elevate our minds above the fading glories, the unstable possessions and vanishing delights of the present life, and to fix our thoughts, affections and hopes upon the blessings of that future state, which shall be revealed hereafter. And may we not add, in the last place, that it is amongst the peculiar excellencies of the Christian religion, that, *in its original institution,* it is pure from all superstitious alloy and useless encumbrances; that it insists principally upon a rational and spiritual service; that the ritual laws, which it ordains, are few in number, decent in themselves, void of all pompous and theatrical representations, and easy to be observed. The positive and external injunctions, which are pressed upon the obedience of Christians in the authentick records of the gospel, *the two sacraments* especially, are

are wisely designed as accessional means and assistances to us in our progress towards perfection; they are intended to testify our unreserved obedience to the Author of our religion for his own sake; and to keep us more attentive to, and punctual in, the observation of those duties, which compose the weightier matters of the divine law.

S E C T. LXXIII.

The consequences which result from a review of the evidence and internal constitution of Christianity. The miraculous influences of almighty power to be discerned in the extraordinary operations of the mind, as well as in the extraordinary effects of the bodily organs.

HERE, then, you will be pleased to permit me once more to interrupt the progress of your meditations, by asking you—Is this a true portrait of the religion of the gospel? Is this a right and fair representation of the nature, end and internal constitution of Christianity? Has any thing been added to the view, which has been here taken of the principal doctrines of the New Testament, which does not necessarily flow from a rational interpretation of Christs discourses, and of those of his apostles? Or, has any thing been omitted, which may justly be thought to detract from the perfection of the evangelical morality, and to render it less amiable, less clear, or less practicable? What then are the genuine consequences to be deduced from these observations? It certainly follows from hence, that there is an admirable union and connection between the external and internal evidence of our holy religion, and that the argument is complete in favour of its divine authority—It cer-

tainly follows from hence, that the Christian institution could not possibly be the product either of imposture or enthusiasm; and that it is, in all respects, worthy the interposition of that almighty Being, from whose mercies to mankind it claims its high original, to put together all the wise and good precepts, which had ever been delivered by the wisest men, both Jews and Gentiles, of every sect, and of every preceding age; to improve and exalt these precepts to the highest degree of excellency and perfection; to separate and lay aside the superstitious opinions and practices, which had debased and corrupted the moral instructions of all the ancient philosophers and lawgivers; to supply the salutary doctrines, wherein the religious institutions of all nations had been hitherto altogether deficient; to blend the whole into a plain, entire and well-connected system, upon the foundation of certain and consistent principles; and, in the last place, nicely to adjust the exact quantity of evidence, which was necessary to convey this system of doctrines and precepts to the faith of posterity, as the revealed word of God—this is the peculiar character of the Christian Religion---And can it enter into the heart of any man to conceive, that a poor illiterate mechanick, assisted by a few untaught, despised, hated and persecuted fishermen, all born in a land of bigotry, superstition and ignorance, could have contrived and executed so arduous an undertaking by the strength of their own reason, meditations, invention and resolution? The miraculous influences of almighty power and wisdom may be as clearly discerned by the extraordinary operations of the mind, as by the extraordinary effects of the hands, or of any other of the external organs; *nor can I be less certain, when I read with attention the doctrines and precepts of Christ and his apostles,*
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and behold, as I at this dayds, the amazing success, which every where accompanied their preaching, that they were under the immediate and extraordinary aid and direction of heaven, than if I had actually seen them opening the eyes of a man born blind, or giving hearing to one, who had been deaf from his mothers womb. For the powers of the human mind, in the usual and common course of Providence, have their true and proper limits, as much as those of the body.

S E C T. LXXIV.

What sort of difficulties and objections do not affect the truth of Christianity, as a revelation of Gods will.

THE foundation of Christianity being thus laid upon the existence of certain facts, and the superstructure of our holy faith entirely raised upon the testimony of the evangelists and apostles, and the authenticity of the writings of the New Testament: nothing can be more manifest, than that all attacks made upon the truth of this religion, which have not a direct tendency, either to destroy the existence of the principal facts, upon which it is built; or to lessen the credibility of the persons, who bear witness to them; or to render the genuineness of the books, in which they are recorded, justly doubtful and suspicious, are vain, impotent, and ineffectual; and serve for no other purpose, than to expose the unskilfulness, or malice, of the unfair adversary, who has recourse to such improper methods of offence. Until it can be demonstrated, that Christianity is unworthy the divine Being, and cannot possibly be of any service to promote the greatest happiness of its professors; until

until the rock of external evidence, upon which this religion is so solidly founded, be overturned : though the rains descend, the floods come, and the winds beat upon it with their severest fury, yet will it ever stand secure in defiance of the raging tempest— *When, therefore, it is objected to Christianity, that it cannot be a true revelation of Gods will, either because it containeth some things in its doctrinal part obscure, and not easy to be comprehended, understood, and explained; or, because it was not made known from the beginning of the world; or, because it has not been universally published, and propagated amongst all nations of the earth; or, because it has not had that happy influence upon the moral behaviour of its professors, in introducing the practice of universal righteousness, which might have been expected from a system of religion planned and discovered by God himself—*How easy is it to point out the weakness, the impropriety, and the unreasonableness of *all such extrinsick objections*, as they may justly be denominated? For though we should admit them in their utmost force, and to their fullest extent; though we should allow, that the doctrines of Christianity (where they are describing the wonderful counsels of the Deity in his dispensations towards the children of men) are perplexed with great difficulties; that no sufficient reason can be assigned by us, why Christianity did not make its appearance in the world earlier; why it has not been universally embraced, or why it has not had a more general, and better, effect upon the minds of its followers: yet, certainly, it would not follow even from these large concessions (which, however, it is not necessary that we should make) that Christianity is not an extraordinary revelation of the divine will unto mankind. It undoubtedly would not follow from these premises, that Jesus Christ was not born in
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the land of Judea in the reign of Augustus Cæsar; that he did not take upon him the character of the Jewish Messiah; that he did not endeavour to propagate a new religion in the name of almighty God, whose beloved Son he claimed to be; that he did not work many miracles in attestation of his divine mission; that he did not give to his apostles authority to make profelytes to his doctrines in all nations; that the books of the New Testament are not the genuine works of the persons whose names they bear; or that the doctrines and precepts of Christianity have not a natural tendency to make the believers and practisers of them both wiser and better men. Follow, indeed, it will from these concessions, as from ten thousand other instances, that we are extremely short-sighted, and that our intellectual powers are found weak and inefficient, whenever they attempt to fathom the deep and hidden things of God. But surely no modest man, no man of sound understanding, will venture to assert, that an infinitely-wise and powerful Being can have no good reasons for his conduct towards mankind, but we must see and be made acquainted with them: or, that our not being able to assign a sufficient cause for a fact, of whose existence we can have no doubt, is a satisfactory evidence, or even presumption, that such cause cannot be assigned. To argue, therefore, either against the truth of Christianity in general, or of any particular doctrines delivered in the Scripture history, because we cannot completely account for them, agreeably to our present notions of things, and because they do not exactly correspond with our own experiences and narrow conceptions, is just as wise and justifiable, as it would be for a person born and educated in a cave under ground without having ever seen the light of the sun,

or the earth, or heavens, or the animals and vegetables, which are in the world, to deny the existence of these things, only because he had never seen them himself, though he had the testimony of a multitude of the most unexceptionable witnesses to confirm their existence to him. There are as great difficulties, and propositions as hard to be comprehended, understood and explained in the physical, as there are in the religious world! Shall we therefore become atheists, because we know not how to account for the works of the creation, how they were, *at first*, produced out of nothing, and how they are, *at present*, continued in being?

S E C T. LXXV.

After what manner we are to think and argue, when pressed with objections against the truth of the Christian religion, taken from our not being able completely to comprehend and understand some of its doctrines. The true boundaries of reason and religious faith marked out.

WHENEVER, therefore, we find ourselves pressed with objections of this nature against our holy religion, taken either from our mere ignorance of the reasons of the conduct of divine Providence, or from our deficient and inadequate conceptions of things; instead of being too anxious in our search of solutions, and of indulging ourselves in philosophical speculations concerning them; instead of suffering them to make too strong an impression upon our doubting minds, let us rather think it our wisdom, as we shall certainly find it to be our truest interest, to argue upon the important subject in the following manner. *We believe, that in the fullness of time*
 God

God sent his Son made of a woman, to teach mankind both by precept and example, how they might best and most effectually serve their Creatour. We believe, likewise, that Jesus Christ was the true Messiah promised in the ancient Jewish scriptures, that he is the one Mediatour between God and man; and that he laid down his life for the redemption and salvation of all truly-repenting sinners. We believe also, that the influence of the Holy Spirit is ever ready to assist us in our earnest endeavours after the acquisition of that true holyness, which is made the basis of Christianity, and without which no man shall see the Lord. But why do we believe these and other points of doctrine, which are discovered in the New Testament, and which distinguish the faith of a Christian from that of all the world besides? Not because we are able fully to inform ourselves, why man was created in such a manner, as, after having fallen from his original perfection, to stand in need of a Saviour: or why the seed of Abraham was selected to be the source of the Messiah, preferably to all other families of the earth: not because we can conceive a clear notion of the doctrines of redemption, justification and divine assistance, or can describe the manner of their operation scientifically: not because we have an adequate perception of the nature of inspiration, or have sagacity sufficient to answer all the perplexing questions, with which peevish, subtle and malicious metaphysicians may be able to press us upon these interesting subjects—But *we profess to believe them, because we find these articles proposed to our faith in those books, which (we are entirely convinced by a series of the most indisputable evidence) were originally composed under the direction and influence of the divine Being;*
and

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and which, upon that account, we are indispensibly obliged to obey as the infallible oracles of God. For the same reason, which tells us that we are to believe nothing *as coming from God*, which is inconsistent with his perfections, which manifestly contradicts the testimony of our senses, and is expressly repugnant to the natural connection of our ideas, whispers to us, likewise, that many things may be derived from the Fountain of light and truth, and may deserve to be credited as such, though they may be above and beyond our comprehension, and are not to be completely understood and explained in our present obscure and imperfect view of things. Whatsoever, therefore, is plainly proved to be of divine revelation by the most proper arguments, which the subject is capable of receiving, ought to over-rule all our opinions, prejudices and interests, and has a right to be embraced with full assent. *For no proposition can be more demonstrated than this, that a doctrine, taught by infinite wisdom and truth, is a true doctrine.* Such a submission, as is here supposed, of reason to faith, takes not away the landmarks of knowledge, but leaves to us the distinct use of our several faculties, for which they were given to us. Reason, as was originally intended by the Author of our being, must be the last judge and guide in every thing. I do not mean, that we must consult reason, and try whether a proposition revealed from God can be made out agreeably to our natural notions and principles, and if not, that then we are to reject it: *but consult it we must, and by it carefully examine, whether it be a revelation from God, or not—*And if reason finds it to be revealed from God, reason then declares for it, as much as for any other truth, which it has discovered by its proper medium, and makes it one of her dictates.

dictates. Reasonable men, therefore, having found nothing that makes the Christian revelation inconsistent with itself; nor that is repugnant to any of the divine truths, which reason and the works of God demonstrate to them, will never set up reason, in contradiction to it, *on account of things plainly taught, but incomprehensible as to their manner of being.* If they did, their reason would be false and deceitful, they would cease to be reasonable men.*

S E C T. LXXVI.

Human knowledge very imperfect. The fundamental doctrines of natural religion as inexplicable and mysterious, as those of revealed.

ARE we, then, blindly to surrender our assent, *our religious faith*, to the truth of propositions, where we cannot previously discern and demonstrate the connection between the terms of which they consist? Does not such a conduct appear irrational, and will it not open a wide door for error, delusion and imposture to enter in at?—The man who will neither believe nor act, but in cases where he has a complete knowledge; he who will take nothing upon the report of others, nor give credit to any thing, of which he is not absolutely certain by his own experience, or the use of his own faculties, will pass his time both useless to the world, and extremely disagreeable to himself. Shall we not eat and drink, because we know not how our food digests, and are unable to understand and explain the manner, how it turns to blood and nourishment? Shall we not make use of the physicians art, because we do not comprehend the mechanical process, by which his medicines will effect our cure? Such a conduct would

* Lord Bolingbroke's works.

be utterly ridiculous in common life, and the unhappy wretch who really argued after this manner, and behaved accordingly, would be undoubtedly recommended, by the common voice, to the charitable guardianship of his friends. Why then should a conduct entirely similar be thought more reasonable in religious matters, than in others of far less importance? *There are difficulties, it is acknowledged on all hands, there are certainly points mysterious, incomprehensible and inexplicable in natural, as well as revealed religion; shall we then suspend our duty, and have no religion, until all these things are rendered clear, plain and easy both to the wise and simple, to the learned and unlearned?* We believe that there is a God, a Being of all imaginable perfection—but after what manner this self-derived Being exists; how his foreknowledge is to be reconciled with human liberty; how he, who is in heaven above, can, at the same time, be about my path and about my bed, and yet be unextended, we are utterly ignorant, and ever shall continue so, till this mortal shall have put on immortality, and we are permitted to see him, as he is. We believe, also, that a just, wise and good God will be a rewarder of them, who diligently seek him. But when is this retribution to commence? That it is not regularly conferred, in the present life, innumerable instances may assure us. It must be, therefore, after death. But how, and in what manner our souls can act, when separated from those bodies, whose instrumentality they now use; how we can recover all our former consciousness, and again become capable of pleasure and pain, we know as little as we do of the most inexplicable propositions, which are found in the Christian institution. In all these points, and in many others of a like nature

nature which might be mentioned, our ideas of the several terms, of which the proposition consists, are clear and distinct, and we are well able to judge of the validity of the proofs, which are brought to shew the mutual connection or disunion of these ideas in a certain respect, though it be confessedly beyond the extent of our present faculties to penetrate into every subtle nicety relating to them—*We may, therefore, depend upon it, that, being created active rather than speculative beings; neither natural nor revealed religion requires us to vex and torment ourselves about questions, which can serve to no valuable purpose, and which have no other tendency but to beget and maintain strife and dissensions, and to undermine both our faith and practice.* Though speculative curiosity, certainly, be not blameable, whilst it is restrained within the bounds of modesty and evidence; yet it is much to be condemned, when it is immoderately indulged, and suffered to invade and influence our moral behaviour: when it renders us less active in paying the obedience, which is due to the whole will of our heavenly Father, and less charitable in bearing with the infirmities of our weaker brethren; and when, under the specious pretence of examining and proving all things, it doubts all things, disputes all things, and will find nothing good enough, in the whole compass of religion, for it to hold fast.

S E C T. LXXVII.

The Christian religion may be true though Christ came into the world many ages after its creation, and though his doctrines have not been universally received.

BUT still you ask; if Christianity be an institution so necessary to advance the greatest happiness

happiness of mankind, *why did not the merciful God send his Son into the world sooner? and why are not the salutary doctrines of the gospel equally communicated to all nations?*—When you can tell, why God did not create the world and mankind infinite ages earlier than he did (since his goodness has been always unchangeably the same, and the sooner the magnificent work was commanded into being, the greater would that goodness appear) then may you expect a full and sufficient answer to the preceding questions. In the mean while, you will do well to suit your desire of information to your present state of imperfection, to enquire into the hidden counsels of God with caution, discretion and humility, and *not to make your invincible ignorance upon these arduous points an argument for infidelity.* As God is a Being of essential wisdom, power and righteousness, he must always act consistently with his attributes; whatever he does must be right both in itself, and in all its attending circumstances. If therefore you are convinced, by the evidence which has been so fully laid before you, that Jesus Christ took upon him the appellation of the Son of God; that he gave a new religion to mankind in his Father's name; that he worked many miracles in express confirmation of this religion, and that his words and actions were authentically registered, and are faithfully transmitted to you in the writings which compose the New Testament, surely you can be under no difficulty, nor can entertain any real doubt, about the propriety of the merely circumstantial part, *the time, I mean, the manner, and the place of his coming:* you can have no doubt, but that he came at the fittest season for him to come; that the imperfect propagation of the gospel is entirely reconcileable with the divine perfections; and your faith, notwithstanding

ing all these extrinſick objections, will ſtill remain firm and unſhaken.

S E C T. LXXVIII.

The attributes of God do not oblige him to communicate to all his creatures, even to all thoſe of the ſame ſpecies, either equal degrees of moral and intellectual perfection, or equal means of obtaining happineſs. What return Chriſtians ought to make to God for his eſpecial favours to them.

THAT Chriſtianity is of a late date in compariſon with the beginning of the world; and that a ſmall part only of the earth has been enlightened by the ſalutary influence of the goſpel, we are ready to allow; nor have judicious and ingenious men been wanting to aſſign good reaſons for the conduct of Providence with regard to this circumſtance of the important tranſaction: but whatever may be thought of their ſpeculations, be they more or leſs ſatisfactory to the candid enquirer, ſurely it ill becomes thoſe perſons, to whom this extraordinary revelation of Gods will has been, in fact, communicated, to think lightly of the favour, and to treat it with contempt, as derogatory to the divine goodneſs, *merely becauſe it has not been made univerſal; merely becauſe ſo conſiderable a part of mankind are not rendered partakers of the ſame bleſſing.* For if the condition, which the whole world was in, with reſpect to religion, before the coming of Chriſt, was conſiſtent with the goodneſs of God, as every one who acknowledges that goodneſs muſt grant, certainly the moral ſtate of mankind is not leſs conſiſtent with it at preſent, *the Gentiles having had no injuſtice done to them, by the publication of the goſpel, nor being thereby*

farther removed from happiness, than they were before that memorable event. Sound reason will tell us upon this occasion, that God is not obliged to communicate to all his creatures, even to all those who are of the same species, equal degrees of moral or intellectual perfection, and an equal capacity and opportunity of attaining happiness: and to assert that this would be a profane diminution of his sovereignty. Let us be duly thankful for the means, both ordinary and extraordinary, with which he has furnished us for improving our knowledge and happiness; that he has not given the same advantages to other creatures would be a strange reason either for our own denial of them, or for our not improving them to the utmost. God is certainly no respecter of persons; nor can our moral and religious obligations to faith and obedience be greater and more extensive, than is our moral and religious knowledge. This is the voice of right reason, and this is the undoubted doctrine of the sacred oracles. Hence therefore it incontestably follows, nor do we deny the important consequence, *that the God of all the earth will do strict justice; that he will render glory and honour and peace to every man that worketh good, and inflict tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doth evil; that, in every country and amongst every people, whosoever shall turn from the wickedness which he hath committed, and do that which is lawful and right, shall save his soul alive; and that whosoever transgresseth the law which he actually is, or may be, acquainted with by the proper exercise of the powers, which distinguish him from the brute creation, and does not sincerely repent of the unrighteousness, which he hath been guilty of, shall undoubtedly perish everlastingly.*

everlastingly. Thus will God be justified in his sayings, and overcome when he is judged.

S E C T. LXXIX.

The advantages enjoyed by the Christian preferably to the infidel.

WHAT advantage then hath the Christian more than the infidel, the believer than the unbeliever? *or what doth it profit us to be Christs peculiar people?* much every way. For if our happiness in a future state, as is highly probable, shall increase in proportion to what we know, believe and practise of our duty, upon a principle of obedience to the will of God, in the present life; the consequence is indisputable, that the more we know, believe and practise of our duty here, so much the more pure and exalted will be our joys in the eternal mansions of bliss hereafter. This then is the Christians boasting, and this our serious triumph, that the holy scriptures have made us fully acquainted with all the various relations, which we stand in to the divine nature, *as our creator, preserver, redeemer, and constant assistant in our progress towards perfection;* that our whole duty is laid open to our view, and that we never can be ignorant of what is the good and acceptable will of our sovereign Lord; that we have the strongest motives of gratitude and interest to animate us to live up to the law of our being; and that we are filled with the comfortable assurance, that our merciful God and Father will receive our sincere, though imperfect, endeavours to serve and please him, in and through the death and mediation of his Son Jesus Christ. *The best Christian must be the*

best, and consequently, upon the whole, will be the happiest man. Let it not, therefore, be imagined, as is too often the case, that God arbitrarily assigns to Christians a higher degree of happiness than to others, without having a proper regard to their moral agency, and that this is the doctrine of the gospel. On the contrary, the faith of sincere Christians is always directed to the right and best object, their piety is of the noblest kind, and their virtues the most pure and extensive—To be uniformly engaged in an upright, benevolent, and religious course of action is the solemn vow and profession of Christians.

S E C T. LXXX.

Our happiness gradually increases as the knowledge and practice of our duty increases. Conjectures concerning the nature of our happiness in the next world.

BUT here let us indulge ourselves a little longer upon this most agreeable and pleasing of all reflections to a sensible-rational being, namely, *the gradual increase of his happiness, as the knowledge and practice of his duty increase.* May we not then conjecture, and will not such conjecture be attended with great probability, that our felicity even in that future state, to which we are hastening, will principally arise *from the advancement which will be made in the perfection of our intellectual powers; from a more near, full, and comprehensive view of the divine nature, of the harmony of his several attributes, and of the unerring wisdom and goodness of all his dispensations? Will it not result from those stronger motives of love, piety, gratitude and universal charity, which will, at that*
time,

time, more forcibly operate upon us, and consequently animate our purer and disencumbered faculties to a more faithful, and punctual discharge of our duty? But if this be so, may we not venture to proceed one step further in our reasoning? may we not go on to argue, that the nearer we approach to this celestial state during our abode upon earth, that is, that the more we have revealed unto us, and the more we know of the divine Being and his attributes; of the grounds of the conduct of his providence; of the means appointed for our salvation; of the kingdom of heaven; of the purity of its inhabitants, and of that future glory, which shall never fade away: so much the clearer will our duty, in its full extent, lie open before us, so much the more cogent will be the motives to incite us to the regular practice of this duty, and, consequently, so much the greater will be our happiness both present and future? And, give me leave to add what, I am sure, no seriously-thinking person will contest, so much the more inexcusable shall we be, if, through negligence, indolence, or a corrupted heart, we enquire not into the grounds and reasons of the Christian faith; if we consult not with the utmost attention the books of the evangelists and apostles, and endeavour to learn from them what is the true and acceptable will of God, that we may uniformly and sincerely obey it. For if the guilty heathen shall be requited seven-fold for his offences by the just and righteous Governour of the universe, certainly the punishment of the stubborn, unexamining, disobedient and unrepenting nominal-christian shall be multiplied seventy and seven fold.

S E C T. LXXXI.

God almighty is not partial in his dispensations to mankind. The world will be judged, at the last day, in righteousness. The smallest degree of happiness in heaven not to be attained but by a life of faithful obedience to the will of God.

IS not, then, the Almighty partial, or undiscerning in his dispensations to the children of men? Is he not kinder to some people and nations, even where no previous merit can be supposed, than he appears to be to others? *And what will you say of those distinguishing marks of his favour, which the Jew formerly, and the Christian now so justly glories in?* If it be no imputation to the goodness and justice of our common Parent; that he has created us *men and not angels*; that he has not given to all the same capacity and leisure to know and learn their duty; that he has distributed the natural blessings of health, strength, wealth and power by different weights and measures: surely it will not be thought by any competent and dispassionate judge to derogate from the perfection of those attributes, that some of his creatures are furnished with means, which, if made a proper use of, will render them happier than others, who have not been supplied with the same, or equal opportunities of improving themselves. Could it, indeed, be shewn, that God almighty would judge mankind in the last day, either for not believing what they had never been duly informed of; or for transgressing any duty, which they did not, and could not, know to be their duty; or that he would make them accountable for not being influenced by motives, which

which he never acquainted them with, in that case it would be difficult to reconcile such a proceeding to the divine mercy and justice. But to those who are fully convinced, that every good man, that every man who lives agreeably to the best knowledge of Gods will, which it is in his utmost power to procure, and is in an habitual course of charity, temperance and piety upon a principle of duty to the Lord of the universe, shall be at length made happy in proportion to his moral and religious improvements, no other argument will be wanting to vindicate the honour of the divine attributes. *As to the various degrees of happiness, and the means of attaining them, these must be left with all humility and resignation to the wise distribution of the God of all the earth, to the father of mercies and giver of all good gifts.* But how many soever may be the mansions prepared for the souls of good men in another life; however numerous the classes of cherubim and seraphim may be, we know assuredly from the sacred oracles, whose authority we devoutly revere, that all hatred, envy and malice; that all profaneness, irreligion and brutal indulgence of our passions, will be for ever banished from the celestial regions, and that nothing but love, and harmony, and piety, and temperance, and humble obedience will be permitted to enjoy the happiness of those blessed abodes.

S E C T. LXXXII.

The bad lives of Christians, nor the abuses which have been made of the doctrines of Christianity prove, that the Christian religion was not originally revealed from heaven.

IT will not, therefore, be looked upon by those, who, unseduced by a pomp of words and a specious shew of argument, know how to estimate the real and intrinsic value of things, as any objection to the truth and usefulness of our holy religion, that its precepts have so little influence upon the lives even of its warmest advocates; that crafty, self-interested and ambitious men (both of the clergy and laity) have frequently disguised themselves under its venerable appearance the more securely to deceive mankind, and to prey upon their credulity; and that the annals both of civil and ecclesiastical history are full of the wars, tumults, rebellions and cruelties, which Christianity has occasioned. For the crime in all these instances, the artifice, the imposture, the wickedness wholly belong to the profane hypocrites themselves, who have so presumptuously dared to sport with things sacred, and to sacrifice their God to the momentary views of profit, power and revenge. *Passion, whenever an opportunity offered, never yet wanted a pretext to indulge its favourite propensity: and to imagine, that there have been more quarrels, disputes and bloodshed, since the establishment of the Christian religion, than there were before, is to be wholly ignorant of the history of mankind.* Are there not continual strifes, contentions, hatreds, animosities and battles amongst the nations, who have no other religion, but that which nature has pointed out to them? or
do

do all men, who have reason only for their guide in matters of morality, live agreeably to what they know and profess to be her genuine dictates? and because they do not; because they impiously and detestably abuse her powers, shall we absurdly conclude, that her deductions are false, and never to be depended upon; that our notions of God and his attributes are without foundation; that there is no truth in natural religion; and that mankind would, in the event, have been happier than they now are, had they never perplexed themselves at all with their reflections upon these subjects? The ancient Roman commonwealth was overturned by Julius Cæsar under the specious pretence of love to his country, and a zeal for her best interests; Britain, in the last age, was enslaved by outcries for liberty; and, at this day, many are delivered to all the cruelties of the inquisition, with protestations of the most diffusive charity for the souls of the sufferers—Are, therefore, the love of our country, just notions of civil liberty, and universal charity, to be traduced and proscribed as mere names without a meaning, as criminal and pernicious to societies? Naked mischief is deformed and frightful; nor will any man be fool enough, or mad enough, to follow those, who profess to lead him to open destruction. The hook therefore must be baited with something, which is pleasant, lovely, and attracting; the wolf within must put on the dress of the innocent lamb; and the false colours of benevolence, moderation, or pure religion are hung out to bring in prizes to infidelity, malice, ambition, revenge or persecution. Most devoutly, indeed, is it to be wished, that a religion, which leads, excites and encourages its professors to aim at every kind of moral and intellectual perfection; which prevails on all wise men to pursue peace,
piety

piety and righteousness ; to be good neighbours, good friends, good subjects, and good in every various relation—most devoutly, I say, is it to be wished, that such a religion could exert its full power, and genuine influence over all mens hearts and lives ; and that no one, who nameth the name of Christ, would act contrary to the known rules of his profession by impiously affronting his Maker ; by debauching himself, and by dealing injuriously with his neighbour. *Happy then, compleatly happy should we be as rational, as social, and as immortal beings.*

S E C T. LXXXIII.

Address to infidels, exhorting them impartially to examine the evidence and tendency of Christianity by the books of the New Testament.

GO, then, *you* who are so ready to speak against the gospel of the benevolent Jesus, to abuse his doctrines, to attack his authority, and to vilify his ordinances ; *you*, who despise the wisdom of the wisest in comparison of the presumptuous suggestions of your own understanding ; *you*, who so dogmatically argue against dogmatizing ; *you*, who under the flattering insinuation of setting your fellow-creatures free from the galling fetters of priest-craft, and the heavy yoke of systematical theology, would overturn the surest foundations of all that is just, and holy, and good—to *you* do I now particularly address myself—Take our New Testament into your hands, the true and only test of the Christian religion, and try the book with candour and impartiality by its own intrinsic merit : examine it page by page with your severest care, and most strict attention—and then tell us,

OR

or rather answer yourselves, where you find those wrong notions of the Deity, and those misrepresentations of his attributes, which you are so apt to lay to its charge in your harangues to your credulous followers—and then tell us, where you find that covetousness and ambition, that spirit of anger and revenge, that tyranny and oppression, and that stubbornness and sedition, which are the seeds of general wretchedness and misery amongst men? If you can any where read, that those sacred volumes give but a consequential commission, or encouragement to do injustice or violence; if they any where permit us to wound or to persecute; to defraud or to deceive; to gripe or to extort; to calumniate or to revile; let them be discarded, at once, with the scorn and contempt of all good men. If they afford the least motive or inducement to a disregard of God, or ill-will to man; to pride or luxury; to uncleanness or intemperance; if they any where allow us to build our pleasures, or our fortunes upon our neighbours miseries; if they give the least indulgence to superstition, or place the essence of religion in mere obedience to external ordinances—in that case, let not the enemies of these writings be defrauded of the glory of their perpetual opposition to them; we will acknowledge the imposture, and seek some better, and more effectual, means of recommending ourselves to the protection, favour and blessings of our God—But, on the contrary, *if the sacred code of our religious faith be crowded with precepts of piety and devotion; justice and charity; humility and modesty; meekness and sobriety; resignation and contentment: if we are therein constantly instructed to believe in God, to depend upon his goodness, to call upon him in our necessities, and to glorify him in all things; if we are uniformly encouraged in almost every line of*
those

those writings to do all the good we can to our fellow-creatures; to obey the powers that are in authority over us; to honour our superiours; to love all mankind and to forgive our enemies; to be publick-spirited and followers of peace; to be satisfied with our own; to be diligent in our several stations and callings, and to do to others, as we would wish should be done unto ourselves in similar circumstances—such an institution will surely be allowed by every friend of peace, righteousness and mankind to be of the utmost benefit to the tranquillity and well-being of civil government—And with the greatest confidence may it be asserted, that they who labour to stop the progress of so useful, and so extensively benevolent a system (if that be the name under which the doctrines and precepts of Christianity are to be comprehended) and to procure its disbelief and disgrace, are enemies of the true interest of their country in general, as well as of the greatest happiness of individuals in particular.

S E C T. LXXXIV.

The address to infidels continued. The folly and ill consequences of endeavouring to weaken the belief of a God.

BUT we will argue this matter still more closely with you—*Every wise man* proposes to himself some end in his undertakings; *a wise man* has always some rational view, or prospect, before him, either to excite, or reward his labours. But what valuable purpose can you intend to serve, by opposing the Christian institution, and speaking evil of the gospel? Would you, as the vain Epicurus formerly boasted, *would you deliver the world from the fear of God!* But this is such a deliverance,

ance, as dragging the helpless infant from the bosom of its affectionate parent, and exposing it to all the dangers and miseries of desertion; it is setting a man free from the advice and protection of his ablest, surest and best friend; it is depriving the human soul of its most solid comfort, its purest joy and best hope. But after all which you can attempt, utterly to extinguish this fear will certainly be found an achievement much too difficult for your strongest efforts to accomplish. The idea of a perfectly-wise, just and omnipotent being, when it has once gotten possession of the human breast, can never afterwards be entirely removed; it will be continually ready to return with fresh force, whenever we are involved in any danger, and will take every advantage to attack us in calamity, in pain, or in the vapours. And if not; I mean, could the belief and fear of God be quite banished from our souls, what would be the consequence of such a victory over this most fundamental article of faith? *it would be succeeded by fears more lasting, more affecting and unavoidable, namely, the fear of one another.* For if there be not a God, who inspecteth, ruleth and judgeth in the earth, there can be no sure ground of confidence in man. Were it not for the fear of God and his justice, we should have perpetual occasion to tremble for our pockets, our modesty, or our throats.

S E C T. LXXXV.

The address to infidels continued. The enemies of Christianity are the enemies of civil and social happiness.

IS it, then, for the better order and regulation of civil society, that you first philosophers, and public-lick-

lick-spirited disputers of the age, are so fond of setting up each mans own experience, as the only sure test of true and false, of right and wrong? Is it for the sake either of your prince or your fellow-subjects, that you are so desirous of introducing universal doubt, and of extirpating the notion of a revealed religion? This may, perhaps, be *your wisdom*, but it is directly repugnant to the maxims of the ablest politicians, who, in all ages and countries, have seen and confessed the absolute necessity of this restraint upon the passions of mankind; have ever called it to their assistance in support of government; and, where they have been destitute of real revelations from heaven, have been forced craftily to invent, and to pretend them, for the better maintainance of their own authority, and the common benefit of their people. No merely-human terrors are sufficient to compel one man to want what he sees another enjoy, or to induce him to prolong a wretched life in penury and misery, unless he has the hopeful prospect of greater advantages in another world: *nor can cases of property be securely determined, titles decided, or criminals convicted, without such witnesses, as have a due dread of Gods displeasure before their eyes.* And may we not justly impute to the want of this dread that general corruption and dissoluteness of manners, which are every where prevailing amongst us, and which threaten not only the prosperity, but also the very being of this happy, free and independent nation? And yet you would persuade us—you, who oppose the authority and influence of Christianity, would persuade us to look up to you, to respect and reverence you, as the men of profound sagacity and penetration; as the only impartial thinkers, as the best friends of your dear country, and the genuine assertors of the native privileges

Privileges of mankind. But are *you* the friends of Your country, who advance and publish such notions, as have a natural tendency to introduce anarchy and confusion? are *you* the noble champions of the dignity and just prerogative of the human species, who are for reducing all animal nature to the same common standard? and are *you* to be ranked in the class of sound politicians, whose great ambition it is to propagate principles, which level the prince with the beggar; which, in their consequences, destroy all property and credit, all commerce and honest industry; and which encourage the stronger and more crafty to deceive, plunder and defraud his weaker and unsuspecting neighbour?

S E C T. LXXXVI.

The address to infidels continued. Infidels are enemies even to their own present interest. Their pretences to an extraordinary love of mankind insincere and self-contradictory. Probable motives of their enmity to Christianity.

IS then mere selfishness, and a view to your own private profit and advantage, the true motive of your conduct, and the spring which gives so much activity to your zeal against Christianity? certainly not. For if this were the case, you would not so foolishly strive to overturn those fences, which can alone secure to you the peaceable enjoyment of your estates, and even of your lives. Did you really study, and know, your own interest, though you had perceived a flaw in the religious establishment of your country, you would have cunningly passed it by unremarked, as you were considerable gainers by the credulity of the rest of mankind.

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Had you been so admirably sagacious and penetrating, as to have found out a safe expedient to set yourselves loose from the ties of conscience, you would, nevertheless, have been glad to have held other persons bound by the efficacious chain. Had you any solid claim to the superiour understanding, which you so loudly boast of, like cunning gamesters, you would have kept the trick to yourselves, and have reserved the profits of your wisdom for your own benefit only. But if, to avoid the imputation of folly, or of a worse motive, you pretend a principle of charity for your conduct, and assert, that it is mere compassion for the ignorance of a deluded world; that it is an honest warmth for the cause of truth, and a zeal for virtue, which render you thus solicitous to undeceive your fellow-creatures, and to rescue them from the slavery of imposture and superstition—we will then believe you to be sincere in your plausible professions, when you have made it appear, that the best way to advance the interests of truth and virtue is to discard a religion, which, under the awe of a divine command, contains the best-proved, the plainest and most practicable system of pure and refined morality; we will then believe you to be sincere in your magnificent pretensions, when you have proposed another scheme of duty, which can more powerfully contribute to advance the happiness of society; which can render the lives of good men more comfortable and happy in themselves; which can give them stronger assurances of the divine favour and acceptance, or raise them to more lively, and better-founded hopes of a glorious immortality, than the gospel does. On the contrary, do not all your reasonings and insinuations tend to ravish from them the idea of that blessed eternity in a future state, which is
their

their chief comfort and satisfaction, and to leave them to endless doubts, perplexities, and uncertainties upon the most important subjects? But, perhaps, the noble end, which you propose in abolishing Christianity, is merely *to deliver your deluded fellow-creatures from the consuming terrors of that eternal misery, which, agreeably to the doctrines of the gospel, must accompany the unrepented breach of the divine laws*—But whom do you expect to deliver by your arguments from these unnecessary terrors, as you call them? Not the honest, the sincere, and truly penitent man! for the gospel speaks no terrors to him; on the contrary, it gives him every assurance, which he can either ask or wish to receive, of continual peace, comfort and happiness. The utmost therefore, which you can hope from your most successful labours, is to free the vicious part of mankind, those who give an uninterrupted indulgence to their passions, and persist in an obstinate course of wickedness, from the fears, which they are perpetually under, of a future punishment. *Against offenders of this kind the gospel does, indeed, denounce the most awful threatnings; it condemns them to absolute and irreversible misery*—And can any thing be more right, fitting, equitable and useful, than that confessed rebels to the will of the supreme Governour of the universe should live under the ceaseless apprehension of being, one day, called to a severe account for their wilful and obstinate transgressions of their duty. And small thanks will you deserve from the most thoughtful, the best, and most virtuous, part of your species for your repeated attempts to set such persons at liberty from terrors, so necessary to the support of moral honesty, and the advancement of the common happiness. Surely, then, whilst the arguments, which you usu-

ally offer against the truth of the Christian religion, have a manifest tendency to subvert at the same time all apprehensions, all checks and restraints upon our conduct, arising from the belief of the immortality of the soul, an over-ruling Providence, a future state of retribution, and the just judgements of almighty God for our crimes—you will not impute it to any want of charity in us, if, notwithstanding the great zeal which you profess for the interests of reason, truth and virtue, we suspect that your principal prejudice and enmity against Christianity is, because it sets the fundamental doctrines, precepts and motives even of natural religion in too clear and strong a light, which would, otherwise, be left at large, as they formerly were, to the intricate disputes of philosophers; and, perhaps, be regarded only as the splendid amusements of the schools.

S E C T. LXXXVII.

Address to Christians. To have recourse to the power of the magistrate either ordinary or extraordinary is not the best way to do honour to Christianity, or to put its adversaries to silence. All methods of this sort are repugnant to the spirit of our religion.

BUT upon whatever motives the opposers of Christianity may be supposed to act; whether they are inspired by vanity, or malevolence, or a desire of stilling the clamours of an uneasy conscience: it certainly behoveth all those, who are really convinced of the divine authority of the gospel, to endeavour to do it honour in all things. To you, therefore, do I now especially address myself, who are Christians in deed, and not in appearance only: it is your duty, as you respect the glory of God,

God, the credit of that name by which you are called, your own happiness, and the welfare of society, to enquire, to know, and to make use of the best and most effectual means to baffle the arguments of the adversaries of your faith, and to reduce them, if possible, to a perpetual silence. A warm and honest heart, a heart full of zeal for the interests of religion, will be ready to reply at once, *pursue and punish these baptized infidels as pests of society, and the common enemies of mankind. Let them severely suffer, as manifest opposers of the truth, either in their pockets, or their persons*—But what will you do to lay them under a legal conviction? or how will you be able to distinguish justly, betwixt real and affected doubts; betwixt an impartial search after truth, and malicious cavilling; between conscientious scruples, and solemn ridicule? It is impossible for the wisest body of written laws to reach to every kind and degree of profaneness and blasphemy; and so skilful is the scorner become in the most crafty ways of communicating his sentiments to the public, that he is able to throw contempt upon the established religion by mere winks, hints and insinuations; that by a pretended approbation and defence of the gospel he can expose it to the laughter of the vicious, and the indifferent; that he can affront his Maker by quoting his own words; and, like Judas, come to Christ with a hail and a kiss, at the same moment wherein he is basely intending to betray him. *Are you, then, for erecting a court of justice for the particular trial of blasphemy and irreligion?* are you for setting up a high-commission court, a court of judicature with full authority to receive all complaints against the oppugners of the established religion; to enquire into the series, tenour and connection of their books and discourses;

To examine the motives, ways and manners how the offensive expressions were uttered; to consider the antecedent characters and behaviour of the accused; and, at their discretion, to determine, whether they are guilty of profaneness or not? Such a method of proceeding with infidelity might, indeed, be of essential service to the cause of true religion, could we be sure of a court of inviolable integrity; could we be sure to have men continually presiding in it free from all danger of corruption; men upright and impartial; men of a sound and well-informed understanding; men of true magnanimity, void of self-interest, and without malice on the one hand, or mistaken zeal on the other. But until this fundamental point can be secured, every person of candour, benevolence, and experience in the history of the world, *will be against an arbitrary and despotick power as well in church as state, as well in religious as civil matters*, under whatever amiable shape or form it may appear, or for whatever good purposes it may be piously intended. We have seen the Roman pontiffs defacing, and almost destroying, the Christian institution by the exercise of so exorbitant a jurisdiction over the consciences of their brethren: and should any other set or society of men (in the present state of human weakness and imperfection) be ever intrusted with so extensive an authority, we shall soon see them passing on *from infidels to hereticks; from scoffers at the common faith to honest enquirers after truth; from bold blasphemers to modest dissenters*. It will not be long before we feel them growing into all the cruelty of an inquisition; and perhaps, upon any unexpected turn of publick affairs, insolently punishing what they were originally intended to protect; and branding that profession of faith as schism, which it is now profaneness to oppose,

Let it be added, likewise, that *nothing can be more repugnant to the spirit of genuine Christianity, than for its doctrines to be either proved, or maintained, or propagated by force and violence.* The religion of the mild, gentle, humble, self-denying and benevolent Jesus utterly disclaims, and condemns all harsh methods of proceeding, *where the rights of conscience are concerned*; his gospel needs not any such support, and the defenders of it (were they thoroughly acquainted with the strength of their cause) might justly hold them in contempt.

S E C T. LXXXVIII.

The address to Christians continued. Superiour learning and argument alone are not sufficient to put the enemies of Christianity to silence.

MUST you, then, depend altogether upon learning and argument to baffle the various wiles, and artifices of your subtle opponents? Here, I confess, our holy religion is in its full strength, and our armour impregnable; nor can the evidence, which is urged in defence of the history of our faith, be overthrown without offering violence to the common sense of mankind, without tearing up the very foundations, upon which all kind of credibility is built. Christianity hath every thing to hope, and nothing to fear from a true freedom of thinking, from fair reasoning and impartial enquiry. It is the peculiar honour of the gospel, that as it was at first published, propagated, and made its way into every province of the Roman empire, in the most knowing age of all antiquity: so, likewise, when it was well-nigh lost, and buried under the ignorance, civil revolutions and barbarity of succeeding generations, it again

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raised its sacred head, and recovered its native splendour and perfection, as literature revived, as the science of nature expanded itself, and the art of reasoning grew more generally known and practised. *Sound learning and Gospel-Christianity, from their earliest acquaintance with each other, have never yet been separated*; nor will it, I trust, be ever in the power of conceited wits, contemptuous scorers, or self-important philosophers, to put them asunder.

Taught, however, by experience, let us ingenuously confess, that neither superiour learning, nor superiour argument is found the best and most effectual means to put ignorance, folly and perverseness to silence. For as there are some persons of a light, trifling, and indolent disposition, who walk by sense rather than judgement, and who cannot comprehend the force of evidence, even when it appears before them in its fullest blaze of conviction: so are there others, again, and they not few in number, who blinded by vanity, affectation of singularity and a love of sensual pleasures, will not attend to the admonitions of reason, be they ever so clear and certain; but are resolved not to be convinced, whatever force of proof may be urged in opposition to their favourite notions, preconceived opinions, or darling appetites.

S E C T.

S E C T. LXXXIX.

The address to Christians continued. A religious life, agreeable to the doctrines and precepts of Christ, is the most certain way to do honour to the Christian faith, to refute its malicious adversaries, and to recommend it to the universal approbation, esteem and reception:

BE H O L D therefore, (without having recourse either to the assistance of the civil magistrate on the one hand, or depending wholly upon the aid of reason and literature on the other) behold ! I shew you a more excellent, a more obvious, a more easy and certain way to do honour to your Christian faith, to refute the malice of its adversaries, and to recommend its doctrines to the universal esteem, approbation and acceptance ! *Express the native power, influence and perfection of the gospel of Christ, in the uprightness and integrity of your lives : let a devout sense of Gods goodness in his various dispensations towards mankind, a decent apprehension of his judgements, an unaffected reverence of his holy will and commandments, a spirit of mutual forbearance, condescension and charity towards your fellow-creatures, and a sincere love and admiration of virtue and religion, appear in the whole tenour of your consistent behaviour, and you will effectually still the raging of your bitterest enemies, and blunt the sharp-edged tongues of those, whose satire is chiefly whetted from the disagreement, which is so visible, between the principles and practice of Christians, between their arguments and their actions, between their discourses and their examples. Deprive the scorner, therefore, of this copious source of objection and*
raillery,

raillery, and he will soon be struck dumb. *Let Christs servants be unblameable in their moral and religious conversation, and his adversaries will not have the confidence to blaspheme.* Innocence of manners, and an uniform integrity of life, as they are the brightest ornament, and surest testimony of your own right faith in Christ; so do they render your holy profession more awful, more reputable, and more amiable in the eyes of a discerning world, who, moved by so attracting an example, will catch the *sacred ardour* from you, and be more readily induced to glorify that almighty Being, who has shewed such salvation unto men. Let the true spirit and disposition of your great Master and Saviour shine out in your unaffected practice of piety, temperance and universal benevolence; cherish in yourselves, and heartily cultivate those graces, which are the genuine offspring of a well-informed belief of Jesus and his doctrines, *and you will have no occasion to apprehend the decay of Christianity, or the downfal of the church.* Do you but sincerely renounce the works of sin, and neither the force nor cunning, neither the arguments nor the malice of the wicked shall ever prevail against the common faith. *For so is the will of God, that with well-doing you put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.*

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A N

ALPHABETICAL TABLE

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CHIEF MATTERS

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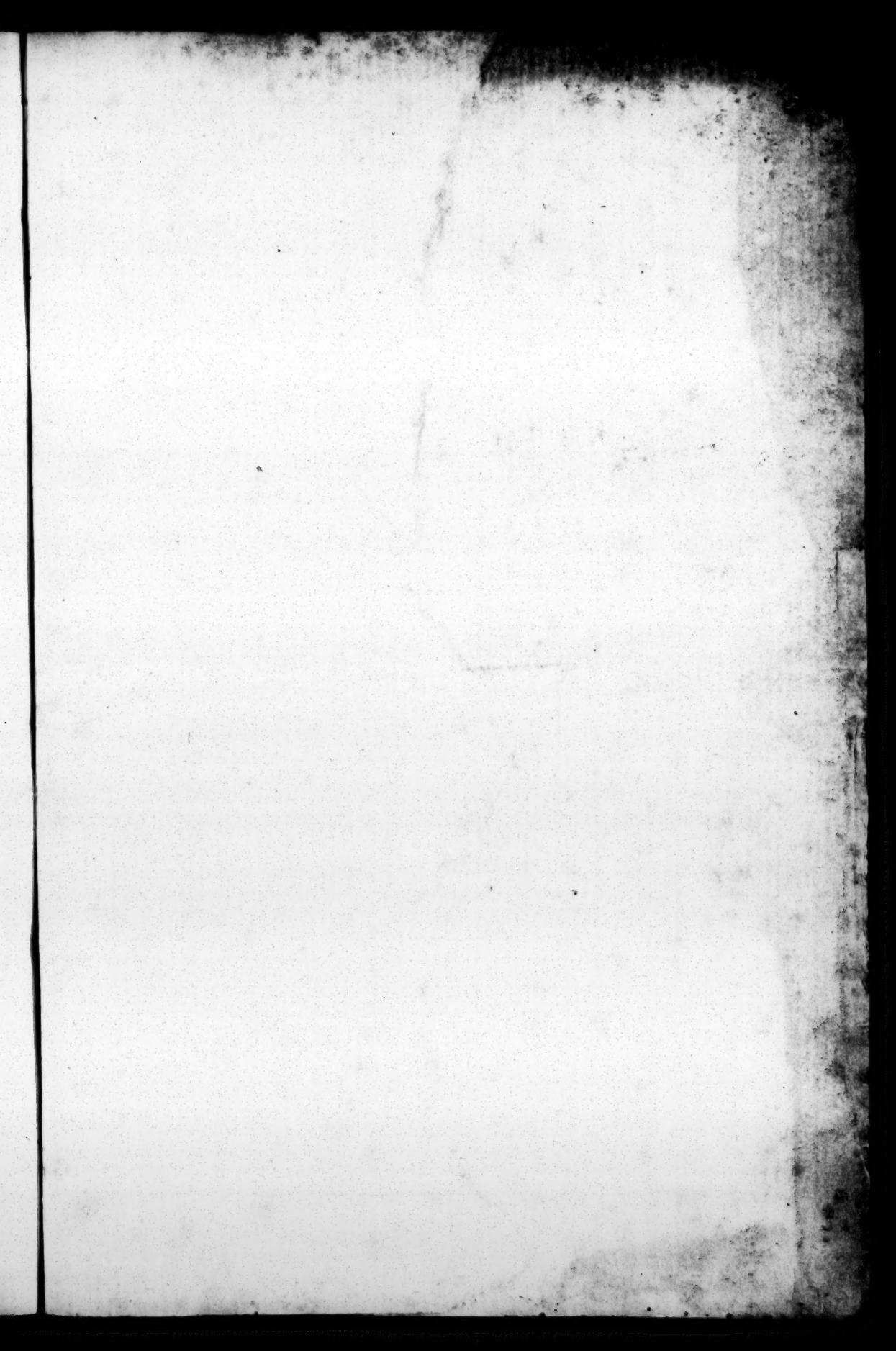
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